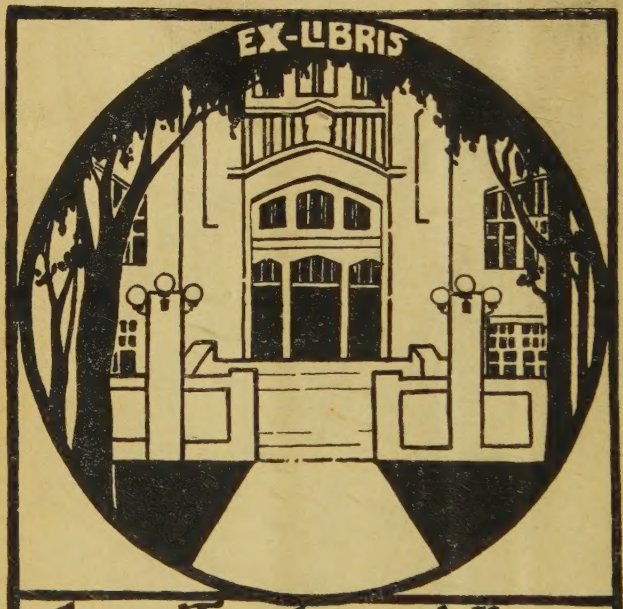

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JOHN FERGUSON

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

BY

ST. JOHN G. ERVINE

NEW EDITION

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY THE AUTHOR

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THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1920

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TO

THE MEMORY OF MY GRANDMOTHER

MARGARET GREER

26413

PREFACE

The issue of a new edition of *John Ferguson* gives me an opportunity to do something that I have long wished to do: publicly to thank the actors and actresses who performed the play at the Garrick and Fulton Theatres in New York from May until October, 1919. Circumstances prevented me from witnessing the performance, but the praise of my friends, English and American, who saw it convinced me that it must have been remarkably good; and, indeed, after seeing the production of Tolstoy's "The Power of Darkness" at the Garrick Theatre in January of this year, I feel certain that all of the plays performed by the Theatre Guild of New York will be well acted and beautifully produced. I am pleased to think that I have had a share in helping to establish a gallant enterprise, and I gladly subscribe myself the debtor and grateful friend of the good servants of art who belong to the Guild.

The peculiar success of this play in America . . . a tragic piece of foreign origin produced at an unfashionable theatre by an unfashionable company . . . seems to have upset many established beliefs about the kind of play the public wants. There is a curious faith held by theatrical managers that the more empty a play is, the better will the generality of audiences like it, and large sums of money are expended annually by these managers in the

production of puerile plays in the hope that one of them will be sufficiently silly to make the fortune of its producer. It is not my business to teach the theatre-manager *his* business, but I sometimes wonder whether his theory would be supported by a study of theatrical balance-sheets. We are often told of the great sums of money made out of this or that drivelling revue, but are told singularly little of the bankruptcies that have also been caused by drivelling revues. I imagine that if an accurate financial statement covering the history of the theatre either in America or in England were prepared, it would be found that the amount of money irretrievably lost on "popular" pieces would be far in excess of the amount lost on "unpopular" pieces, having regard to the capital invested in each; and I should not be astonished to discover from such a balance-sheet that the "high-brow" drama had more or less paid its way while the "low-brow" or "no-brow-at-all" drama had not done so. But these are matters of opinion — there are no statistics available on which to found arguments — and I do not doubt that the commercial theatre-manager who reads these words . . . if he troubles to read them at all . . . will at this point become convulsed with laughter. Nothing but bankruptcy and the hell that has been specially prepared for those who spend their lives in debasing the public taste . . . a hell in which, for all eternity, they will be compelled to witness their own theatrical entertainments . . . will convince them that this is no laughing matter.

As for me, I am content. My belief that any sincerely-written play, however gloomy it may be, will gain the support of the general public, provided that it does not dis-

gust them with their kind and bears a clear and indisputable relationship to human life, is supported by my experience of the reception given in America to *John Ferguson*. I have no illusions about my play. I do not regard it as a work of genius nor do I imagine that I am the greatest of all dramatists, living or dead. There are many flaws in this play, and I sometimes wish that I were again a dramatic critic so that I might point them out. But it has at least this merit, that it is an honest and, I hope, skilful attempt to put human beings upon the stage as human beings, and not as stuffed dummies hired from a theatrical costumer. I define a bad dramatist as a man who goes into the theatre and never comes out again; and I define a good dramatist as a man who is constantly checking the creatures of his imagination with the creatures who live around him. Imagination, unchecked by experience, becomes violence or sentimentality, and the writer who does not frequently renew his contacts with human beings is in desperate danger of substituting rhetoric for speech and opinions for feelings; and the end of such men is written in oblivion.

John Ferguson is a tragic play, but I think I may claim that it is not a depressing play. It does not disgust with humanity those who read it or see it performed. An audience should leave a theatre, after seeing a tragedy, in a state of pride . . . proud that they are human and of the same species as the tragic figures; and it is interesting to find that tragedy has been the main fore of the Heroic Ages. We think of Greece more as the home of Euripides than of the home of Aristophanes, and we think of Elizabethan England as the home of the Shake-

speare who wrote *Hamlet* and *Lear* and *Romeo and Juliet* rather than the home of the Shakespeare who wrote *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor.* The most certain of all the signs of decadence in a nation is the fact that it cannot witness the performance of tragedy but must ever be titillated by comic entertainments. My experience as a soldier showed me that men whose lives were passed in danger were less easily satisfied by trivial performances than were the civilians living in comfort and security. Home on leave from France, I saw expensively-mounted entertainments in London theatres, immensely satisfying to civilians, which, had they been produced by a Concert Party at the Front, would have caused the officers in charge to be courtmartialed. Soldiers got very little pleasure from these things, to which they were taken by their civilian feminine relatives, and I have often heard officers in France, newly back from leave, answer, when asked what sort of plays were to be seen in town, "Oh, the usual damned rot!" And in time, all these puerile revues and cheap plays became known among soldiers as civilian stuff. Shakespeare and Bernard Shaw, driven out of the commercial theatre during the war, found a home in the soldiers' theatres in France; and it is only since the Armistice and the demobilization of the fighting men that decent drama has contrived to get back to the English stage. Mr. John Drinkwater's noble play, *Abraham Lincoln,* Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac,* Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and *The Merchant of Venice* and *Julius Cæsar,* Sheridan's *The School for Scandal,* Mr. Lennox Robinson's *The Lost Leader,* Mr. Shaw's *Arms and the Man,* and lastly, but most remarkably of all, *The Trojan*

Women of Euripides have all drawn large and enthusiastic audiences to the theatre in London, since the signing of the Armistice, and in spite of heat waves and railway strikes, at a time when " popular " pieces were failing to pay the cost of their advertisements. *The Trojan Women* was actually performed with success in a London music-hall!

I am not a prophet and I cannot interpret signs; but surely I am not over-optimistic in believing that there is a public which will support intelligent and sincere drama and is not unwilling to see the work of the master-dramatist decently done. The fact that *John Ferguson* was able to draw large audiences for six months, including the period of the hot weather and the Actors' Strike, indicates, does it not, that there are many people in New York who will pay to see such plays as mine? And will not these people pay to see much better plays than mine? I think they will. I think that the commercial manager does an injustice to the play-going public when he assumes that nothing is too silly or vulgar for them; and the wish of my life is that the success of my play in America will induce the commercial managers to give the American people a chance to see performed in a public theatre that vital, native drama which is, I am quite certain, being produced somewhere in this great continent. I like to think that a young man, disregarding discouragements, is writing American plays . . . in some remote village, perhaps . . . that will reveal his country not only to his countrymen but to the world with that degree of intimacy and understanding that I find in the books of Mr. Winston Churchill, " O. Henry," Mrs. Edith Wharton and Mr. Ernest Poole. There must be in Amer-

ica, many dramatists who can write plays that are on the level of Mr. Poole's great novel, *The Harbor*. Why will the commercial manager not let these dramatists prove that they exist and have the power and the skill to do what Vaughn Moody did in *The Great Divide*, what the novelists I have named have done in fiction. People tell me that the reception given to *John Ferguson* has caused the commercial manager to re-consider his theory, and even as I write, I hear the praises of Mr. Eugene O'Neill's play, *Beyond the Horizon*. If I could feel that I had cleared the way for that young American dramatist whom I imagine in a remote village or in some college hall striving to express himself greatly in drama, I should feel proud and happy, and my play would have a merit in my mind surpassing any other merit it may possess.

St. John Ervine.

Chicago, February 7, 1920.

CHARACTERS

JOHN FERGUSON, *a farmer.*

SARAH FERGUSON, *his wife.*

ANDREW FERGUSON, *his son.*

HANNAH FERGUSON, *his daughter.*

JAMES CAESAR, *a grocer.*

HENRY WITHEROW, *a farmer and miller.*

"CLUTIE" JOHN MAGRATH, *a beggar.*

SAM MAWHINNEY, *a postman.*

SERGEANT KERNAGHAN, R.I.C.

TWO CONSTABLES.

A CROWD OF MEN AND WOMEN, BOYS AND GIRLS.

The Scene is laid in the kitchen of a farm-house in County Down.

The Time is in the late summer of the year 188–.

"CLUTIE" *is a slang expression meaning "left-handed."*

There is an interval of an hour between the First and Second Acts; of a night between the Second and Third; and of a fortnight between the Third and Fourth.

John Ferguson was performed for the first time in America at the Garrick Theatre, New York, by the Theatre Guild, on May 12th, 1919. It was produced by Mr. Augustin Duncan with the following cast:

JOHN FERGUSON	*Augustin Duncan*
SARAH FERGUSON	*Helen Westley*
ANDREW FERGUSON	*Rollo Peters*
HANNAH FERGUSON	*Helen Freeman*
JAMES CÆSAR	*Dudley Digges*
"CLUTIE" JOHN MAGRATH	*Henry Herbert*
HENRY WITHEROW	*Gordon Burby*
SERGEANT KERNAGHAN	*Michael Carr*
SAM MAWHINNEY	*Walter Geer*

ACT I

It is the afternoon of a warm day in the late summer of the year 188–, *and soft sunlight enters the kitchen of* JOHN FERGUSON'S *farm through the windows and the open door. The kitchen is comfortably furnished, although the* FERGUSONS *are no longer prosperous, for* MRS. FERGUSON, *who is now sitting by the door, mending socks, takes great pride in maintaining the appearance of fortune. She is a short, stout, healthy woman, pleasant and agreeable even when she is as harassed as she now is, and her mind is moulded in the kindliness of an Ulster woman. She is not a very intelligent woman, and so her sympathies are sometimes flattened by her lack of perception, but, within her limitations, she is an excellent wife and a very good mother.*

Her husband, JOHN FERGUSON, *is sitting in front of the turf fire, with a rug wrapped round his legs. He is reading a large Bible to himself, and his lips move as if he were silently pronouncing each word to himself. He is an elderly, tired, delicate-looking man, and his dark beard is turning grey. His eyes are set deeply in his head, and they are full of a dark, glowing colour. His voice is slow but very firm, although his words are gentle. He looks like a portrait of Moses — not that Moses who led the Israelites out of Egypt and was a great captain of hosts, but the*

Moses who surveyed the Promised Land from Mount Nebo in the Plains of Moab.

The furniture of the kitchen is good and substantial, and of the sort that one sees in a decent homestead. The door leading to the loaning ("loanie") or lane in front of the house is in the wall at the back of the scene. A person entering the kitchen from the "loanie" would have a large window on his right hand in the same wall as the door, and a staircase on his left hand. Beyond the staircase, near the front of the scene, is a door leading to other rooms and also to the scullery and back of the farm. The fireplace is in the wall opposite that in which the staircase is set. Under the window is a large sofa. A dresser is set between the foot of the staircase and the door leading to the yard. A large table sits in the centre of the room. JOHN FERGUSON'S *chair now stands against one end of this table, so that he can place his Bible on it easily when he is tired of holding it. The ornaments are those customary in such a house. Over the fireplace a gun is suspended.*

SARAH FERGUSON. I wonder where Hannah is. I haven't seen her for an hour past.

JOHN FERGUSON (*without looking up*). She's mebbe in the fields with Andrew. Listen to this, Sarah! (*He raises his voice as he reads from the thirtieth of the Psalms of David.*) "I will extol thee, O Lord; for thou hast lifted me up, and hast not made my foes to rejoice over me. O Lord, my God, I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me. O Lord, thou hast brought up my soul from the grave: thou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down

into the pit. Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness. (*He emphasises what follows.*) For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." (*He turns to his wife.*) Do you hear that, Sarah? There's great comfort for you!

SARAH FERGUSON. Well, indeed, I hope it will, for we have need of joy in this house. We've bore enough trouble. Here's the farm mortgaged up to the hilt, and you sick and not able to do no work this long while, and Henry Witherow bothering you for the money you owe him! . . .

JOHN FERGUSON (*holding up the Bible so that she can see it*). "Weeping may endure for a night," Sarah, "but joy cometh in the morning." Them's grand words! Don't be complaining now, for sure God never deserts His own people. We have His word for that, Sarah. We're tried a while, and then we're given our reward.

SARAH FERGUSON. Well, we've earned ours anyway! It's a great pity Andrew's such a poor hand on the farm.

JOHN FERGUSON. The lad was never meant for the land, Sarah. You know rightly I dedicated him to the ministry the day he was born. It was a sore blow to the lad when I told him it couldn't be managed, but it was a sorer blow to me.

SARAH FERGUSON. Ay, indeed, it was, John. You were always quaren set on Andrew.

JOHN FERGUSON (*proudly*). He's my son! I have great hopes of Andrew.

SARAH FERGUSON. Well, well, you would have done better, mebbe, to let him go on with his learning, for he's

no use at all on the farm. I hope to my goodness his uncle Andrew'll send the money to pay the mortgage. It's quare him not writing this long while.

JOHN FERGUSON. He's mebbe had bother. He'll write if he has the money by him. You may be sure of that.

SARAH FERGUSON. He never was much of a one for giving anything away, your brother Andrew, and mebbe he'll disappoint you the same as he's disappointed many another person.

JOHN FERGUSON. I know he's near with money, but all the same I think he'll be willing to lend me the price of the mortgage. Him and me was born in this house, and we played here together as wee lads. Our da was born here too, and his da before him. Andrew couldn't let the farm go out of the family after all them generations.

SARAH FERGUSON. I trust, indeed, he'll not, but it's a quare poor look-out when you think he's never answered your letters to him this long time, and him knowing well you were sick and helpless. Dear knows what'll become of us all if he doesn't send the money! Henry Witherow's a hard man, John, and he'll not be willing to wait long. (*She rises and looks out of the door.*) Here's Hannah now! I wonder is the mail in yet!

JOHN FERGUSON. We'll know in a wee while. (*He takes up the Bible again and resumes his reading.*)

[HANNAH FERGUSON, *a beautiful girl of twenty, enters the kitchen from the "loanie." Her thick black hair is uncovered.*

SARAH FERGUSON. Is the mail in yet?

HANNAH FERGUSON (*wearily*). The long-car only went by a minute or two ago. I met "Clutie" John at the end

of the loanie, and he said the mail would be late the day. (*She goes to the window-seat and sits downs.*) It's like Sam Mawhinney to be late the time we want him to be early.

JOHN FERGUSON (*with gentle rebuke in his voice*). Hannah, child! You don't know what trouble the man may have had. It might not be his fault the mail's late. Sometimes there's a storm at sea, and that keeps the boats back. Mebbe the train was delayed. Many's a thing might have happened. You shouldn't be blaming Sam for what's mebbe not his fault.

HANNAH FERGUSON (*going to her father, and putting her arms round his neck*). Da, dear, aren't you the quare one for making excuses for people!

SARAH FERGUSON. Well, sure, a lot of them needs it.

[*She has resumed her seat by the door and is again busy with her work of mending socks.*

HANNAH FERGUSON. How're you now, da? Are you better nor you were a while ago?

JOHN FERGUSON (*cheerfully*). Ah, boys-a-boys, Hannah, what did you mind me of it for? I was near forgetting I was sick at all. That shows I'm better in myself, doesn't it now?

HANNAH FERGUSON (*looking anxiously at him*). You're not letting on, are you, da?

SARAH FERGUSON. Letting on, indeed! Did you ever know your da to let on about anything?

JOHN FERGUSON. Indeed, now, and I let on many's a time! There's whiles, when I'm sitting here before the fire, or mebbe there in front of the door when the days is warm, I pretend to myself I'm better again and can go out

and do a day's work in the fields with any man. (*His voice drops into complaint.*) I haven't been in the fields this long time.

SARAH FERGUSON (*sharply*). Now, don't be going and making yourself unhappy, John!

JOHN FERGUSON. No, woman, I won't. But it's hard for a man to be sitting here with a rug wrapped round his legs, and him not able to do a hand's turn for his wife and family.

HANNAH FERGUSON (*fondling him*). Ah, da, dear!

JOHN FERGUSON (*complaint now controlling his voice*). And me the man that was always active! There wasn't a one in the place could beat me at the reaping, not one. . . . (*He remembers the consolations of his faith, although his voice falters as he speaks the next sentence.*) But it's the will of God! (*He pauses for a moment, and then his mind wanders again to his illness.*) Sometimes, when I hear the men in the fields, cutting the corn and gathering the harvest, and them shouting to one another and laughing hearty together, I near cry. Me not able to go out and help them to bring in the harvest . . . tied here like a wee child! . . .

HANNAH FERGUSON (*tearfully*). Da, da, don't go on that way!

SARAH FERGUSON (*impatiently*). Ah, quit, the two of you! Hannah, I'm surprised at you coming in and upsetting your da, and him keeping his heart up all day!

HANNAH FERGUSON. I didn't mean to bother you, da.

JOHN FERGUSON (*patting her hair*). No, daughter, you didn't. I know that rightly. (*Stirring himself and speaking more briskly.*) Ah, well! "Weeping may en-

dure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." God always has a word to comfort you when your heart's down. Mebbe there's a letter in Sam Mawhinney's bag this minute that'll cheer us all up. I'm a poor, mealy man to be complaining like that, Hannah, when there's many is worse off nor me . . . only I can't help it sometimes. It's when the men are coming down the " loanie " in the evening with their scythes over their shoulders, and then tired and sweating and hungry for their suppers! . . . Well, God knows His own ways best, and there's many in the world has a harder time nor I have.

HANNAH FERGUSON (*trying to take his mind off his illness*). I was letting on too, da!

SARAH FERGUSON. Well, indeed you might have employed your time to better advantage, Hannah. You can let on till you're tired, but you'll never alter anything that way.

JOHN FERGUSON. What were you letting on, daughter?

HANNAH FERGUSON. I was letting on that my Uncle Andrew had sent you all the money you need!

SARAH FERGUSON. Well, I hope your pretence will come true, for if he doesn't, we'll have to flit out of this. It'll break your da's heart to go, and it'll break my heart too. (*She rises and puts her work on the dresser.*) I come here as a young girl, no older nor yourself, Hannah, to be married on your da, and I've lived here ever since. I'll never be happy nowhere else.

JOHN FERGUSON (*ruminatingly*). Ay, it'll be hard to go.

SARAH FERGUSON. There's no sense or purpose in it, God forgive me for saying it!

JOHN FERGUSON. There's a meaning in it, whatever happens. I can't see God's purpose, but I know well there is one. His hand never makes a mistake.

HANNAH FERGUSON (*bitterly*). It's quare and hard to see what purpose there is in misfortune and trouble for people that never done nothing to deserve it!

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, quit it, Hannah! If God was to hear you saying the like of that, he'd mebbe strike you dead.

JOHN FERGUSON. Daughter, dear, you're a young slip of a girl, or you'd never talk that way. (*Sternly.*) Do you think God doesn't know how to look after His own world? (*The severity of his voice relaxes.*) Everything that happens is made to happen, and everything in the world, the commonest wee fly in the bushes before the door there, has a purpose and a meaning. There's things hid from you and me because we're not fit to know them, but the more we fill ourselves with the gloty of God, the better we get to understand the world. It's people that's full of sin, Hannah, that can't see or understand. That's sin — not knowing or understanding! Ignorance is sin. Keeping your mind shut is sin. Not letting the sun and the air and the warmth of God into your heart — that's sin, Hannah!

[*He sinks back in his chair, fatigued by his outburst.*

SARAH FERGUSON. There, now, you've made yourself tired.

JOHN FERGUSON (*weakly*). I'm all right, woman!

HANNAH FERGUSON (*going towards the door*). I wish to my goodness that man Mawhinney would come with the letters!

JOHN FERGUSON. He'll soon be here now.

HANNAH FERGUSON (*looking out*). He's never in sight yet! (*She speaks the next sentence petulantly, returning to her seat on the sofa as she does so.*) Och, here's that man, Jimmy Caesar! I wonder what he wants!

SARAH FERGUSON. I wouldn't be surprised but it's you he's after! This isn't the first time he's been here lately, nor yet the second.

HANNAH FERGUSON (*crossly*). Och, ma, quit talking! I wouldn't marry him if he was the last man in the world.

SARAH FERGUSON. Well, dear bless us, if he was the last man in the world, and I wanted him for myself, I wouldn't like to run the risk of making you an offer of him! Sure, what's wrong with the man?

HANNAH FERGUSON (*contemptuously*). He's an old collie, that's what he is! He has no spirit in him at all! Look at the way he goes on about Henry Witherow and what he'll do to him when he gets the chance! He's had many a chance, but he's done nothing.

SARAH FERGUSON. Would you have him kill the man?

HANNAH FERGUSON. He shouldn't go about the place threatening to have Witherow's life when he doesn't mean to take it.

JOHN FERGUSON. Daughter, dear, I don't like to hear you speaking so bitterly. It's foolish of Jimmy Caesar to talk in the wild way he does, though, dear knows, he's had great provocation. But he doesn't mean the half he says!

HANNAH FERGUSON. Well, he shouldn't say it then!

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, now, Hannah, if we were all to say just what we meant, more nor half of us would be struck dumb.

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, you're right, woman! You are, indeed! Henry Witherow's a hard man, and he put many an indignity on Jimmy Caesar's family. If you knew all he's had to bear, Hannah, you'd pity him, and not be saying hard words against him.

SARAH FERGUSON. Ay, indeed, John! Witherow 'll not be soft on us if we can't pay him what we owe him, and then, Hannah, you'll mebbe understand what Jimmy Caesar's feelings are.

HANNAH FERGUSON. I'll never understand the feelings of a collie. I like a man to have a spirit and do what he's said he'd do, or else keep his tongue quiet in his head.

SARAH FERGUSON. Now, it's brave and hard to be having a spirit in these times. Sure, the man must have some pluck in him to turn round and make a good business for himself after him losing near every halfpenny he had, and that man Witherow near bankrupting him, and killing his old da and ma with grief. That's not a poor, paltry spirit, is it?

JOHN FERGUSON. You'd better quit talking about him now. He'll step in the door any minute. Where was he when you saw him, Hannah?

HANNAH FERGUSON. He was at the foot of the "loanie."

SARAH FERGUSON. It's a credit to him the way he's slaved and saved. I daresay he has a big bit of money saved up in the Ulster Bank. (*She goes to the door and looks out.*) Ay, here he's coming! (*She calls out to* CAESAR.) Is that you, Jimmy? (CAESAR *is heard to shout in response.*) If Hannah was to marry him, the way he wants her. . . .

HANNAH FERGUSON. I wouldn't marry him if he was rolling in riches and had gallons of gold!

SARAH FERGUSON (*returning to the kitchen*). Och, wheesht with you! Sure, the man's right enough, and anyway one man's no worse nor another!

[JAMES CAESAR *comes to the door. He is a mean-looking man, about thirty-five years of age, and his look of meanness is not mitigated by his air of prosperity. His movements are awkward, and his speech is nervous. He is very eager to please* HANNAH, *whom he pretends not to see.*

JAMES CAESAR. Good-day to you all!

JOHN FERGUSON. Good-day to you, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR (*hesitating at the door*). Can I come in?

SARAH FERGUSON. Sure, do! You know you're always welcome here, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR (*entering*). It's kind of you to say that! (*He puts his hat on the dresser.*) It's a brave day!

SARAH FERGUSON. It's not so bad.

JAMES CAESAR. It'll do good to harvest. (*Pretending to see* HANNAH *for the first time.*) Is that you, Hannah? I didn't see you when I come in first. I hope you're keeping your health?

HANNAH FERGUSON (*coldly*). I'm bravely, thank you!

JAMES CAESAR. I didn't see you this while back, and I was wondering to myself were you not well or something. I'm glad to see you looking so fine on it. (*To* JOHN FERGUSON.) Did you hear from your brother Andrew, John?

SARAH FERGUSON. Sam Mawhinney's not got this length yet. Did you see him as you were coming up?

JAMES CAESAR. I did not. Are you keeping well, John?

JOHN FERGUSON. I'm as well as can be expected, Jimmy.

JAMES CAESAR. That's good. I'm glad to hear it. It'll be a great blow to you if you have to leave the farm.

JOHN FERGUSON. It will.

JAMES CAESAR (*bitterness growing into his voice*). Ay, it's a quare blow to any man to have to leave the house he was born and reared in, the way I had to do. It's Witherow has your mortgage, isn't it?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay.

JAMES CAESAR. God curse him!

JOHN FERGUSON (*reproachfully*). Jimmy, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR. Ah, you're a forgiving man, John Ferguson, but I'm not, and never will be. Look at the way he treated me and mine. I've never forgot that, and I never will if I live to be a hundred years old. (*Violently.*) I'll choke the life out of him one of these days!

HANNAH FERGUSON (*turning away scornfully*). Ah, quit, for dear sake. You're always talking, Jimmy Caesar!

JAMES CAESAR (*ashamedly*). Ay, I'm always talking, Hannah, and never doing! 'Deed and you're right! When I think of the things he done to me, I go near distracted with shame for taking it as quiet as I have done. I go out sometimes, demented mad, swearing to have his life — and I come home again, afeard to lay a finger on him. He's big and powerful, and he can take a holt of me and do what he likes with me. I'm heartsore at my weakness! That's the God's truth! You do well, Hannah, to be making little of me for a poor-natured man,

but it's not for want of desire I don't do an injury to him. I haven't the strength — or the courage.

JOHN FERGUSON. What way is that to be talking, Jimmy Caesar? Would you sin your soul with a murder? Man, man, mind what you're saying and thinking! You're in God's grief already for the thoughts you have in your head. Them that has bad thoughts are no better in His eyes nor them that does bad deeds.

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, sure, you can't help having thoughts, whatever kind of a mind you have!

JOHN FERGUSON. You can help brooding on them. What call has Jimmy to be wasting his mind on thinking bad about Henry Witherow? Your life isn't your own to do what you like with. It's God's life, and no one else's. And so is Henry Witherow's. If you take his life or any man's life, no matter why you do it, you're robbing God.

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, for dear sake, quit talking about murders. You'll have me out of my mind with fear. Sure, nobody wants to kill anybody these times, what with civilisation and all them things.

HANNAH FERGUSON (*sneeringly*). Och, ma, don't disturb yourself! Sure, you know it's only talk!

JAMES CAESAR. Hannah!

HANNAH FERGUSON. What?

JAMES CAESAR. I wanted to have a talk with you, and I was wondering would you be coming down the town the night?

HANNAH FERGUSON (*decisively*). I'm not.

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, now, Hannah, you can just go down and get a few things from Jimmy's shop that I'm wanting. I was thinking of going myself, but sure you

can just step that length and bring them back with you; and while you're on the way, Jimmy can say what he wants to say.

HANNAH FERGUSON (*sullenly*). You don't need the things till the morning, ma, and if you give Jimmy the order now, he can send them up the morrow.

JAMES CAESAR. Hannah, I want to speak to you particular. Will you not come out with me for a wee while?

HANNAH FERGUSON. I'm not in the way of going out again the night, thank you!

SARAH FERGUSON. Now, you've nothing to do, Hannah, and you can go along with him rightly.

HANNAH FERGUSON. I've plenty to do.

[HENRY WITHEROW *passes the window.*

SARAH FERGUSON. Lord save us, there's Witherow.

[JAMES CAESAR *instinctively goes into the corner of the room farthest from the door.* HENRY WITHEROW, *a tall, heavy, coarse-looking man, with a thick, brutal jaw, comes into the kitchen. He has a look of great and ruthless strength, and all his movements are those of a man of decision and assurance. He does not ask if he may enter the kitchen and sit down; he assumes that he may do so.*

HENRY WITHEROW (*sitting down*). Well, how're you all the day?

SARAH FERGUSON (*nervously*). We're rightly, thank God, Mr. Witherow!

HENRY WITHEROW. I'm glad to hear it. I was just passing, John, and I thought I'd drop in and hear how you were getting on.

JOHN FERGUSON. That was thoughtful of you, Henry.

HENRY WITHEROW. How're you, Hannah! (*He looks closely at her.*) Boys, but you're getting to be a fine-looking girl, Hannah! (*He turns to* MRS. FERGUSON.) You'll be having all the boys after her! Faith, I wouldn't mind going after her myself.

JAMES CAESAR (*pale with anger*). Keep your talk to yourself, Henry Witherow!

HENRY WITHEROW (*contemptuously*). Ah, you're there, are you? You haven't a notion of him, have you, Hannah?

HANNAH FERGUSON. Your manners could be better, Mr. Witherow.

HENRY WITHEROW (*laughing*). Could they, now? And who would improve them, eh? Mr. James Caesar, Esquire, mebbe?

JAMES CAESAR. We want no discourse with you, Henry Witherow. Your presence in this house is not welcome! . . .

HENRY WITHEROW. Oh, indeed! Have you bought the house? I've heard nothing about the sale, and I think I should have heard something about it. I hold the mortgage, you know. . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. There's no need for bitter talk, Henry. Jimmy forgot himself.

HENRY WITHEROW. Ah, well, as long as he admits it and says he's sorry!

JAMES CAESAR. I'm not sorry.

HENRY WITHEROW. God help you, your tongue's the strongest part of you. (*To* JOHN FERGUSON.) Now that I'm here, John, perhaps we could discuss a wee matter of business. I don't suppose you want to talk about

your affairs before all the neighbours, and so if Mr. James Caesar will attend to his shop. . . .

SARAH FERGUSON (*to* HANNAH). You can go down to the shop with him now, daughter, and leave your da and me to talk to Mr. Witherow. (*She speaks quietly to* HANNAH.) For God's sake, Hannah, have him if he asks you. Witherow 'll not spare us, and mebbe Jimmy 'll pay the mortgage.

HENRY WITHEROW (*to* JOHN FERGUSON). I suppose you haven't had any word from Andrew yet?

JOHN FERGUSON. Not yet, Henry.

HENRY WITHEROW. H'm, that's bad!

[SAM MAWHINNEY, *the postman, goes past the window and then past the door.*

SARAH FERGUSON. Lord bless us, there's Sam Mawhinney away past the door. (*She runs to the door.*) Hi, Sam, are you going past without giving us our letter?

SAM MAWHINNEY (*coming to the door*). What letter, Mrs. Ferguson?

SARAH FERGUSON (*anxiously*). Haven't you one for us? . . .

SAM MAWHINNEY. I have not.

HANNAH FERGUSON. You haven't! . . .

SARAH FERGUSON. Oh, God save us, he hasn't written after all!

HANNAH FERGUSON. Isn't the American mail in yet, Sam?

SAM MAWHINNEY. It's in, right enough. I left a letter at Braniel's from their daughter over in Boston. Were you expecting one?

JOHN FERGUSON (*desolation in his voice*). Ay, Sam,

we were thinking there might be one, but it doesn't matter. We'll not keep you from your work.

SAM MAWHINNEY. I hope you're not put out by it. It's a quare disappointment not to get a letter and you expecting it.

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, Sam, it is.

SAM MAWHINNEY. Well, good-evening to you!

JOHN FERGUSON. Good-evening to you, Sam!

[*The postman quits the door.* SARAH FERGUSON *sits down in a chair near the dresser and begins to cry.* HANNAH *stands at the window looking out with hard, set eyes.* JIMMY CAESAR *stands near her, twisting his cap awkwardly in his hands.* JOHN FERGUSON *lies back in his chair in silence. They are quiet for a few moments, during which* HENRY WITHEROW *glances about him, taking in the situation with satisfaction.*

HENRY WITHEROW. I suppose that means you can't get the money to pay off the mortgage, John?

JOHN FERGUSON. I'm afeard so, Henry.

HENRY WITHEROW (*rising*). Well, I'm sorry for you. I have a great respect for you, John, and I'd do more for you nor for any one, but money's very close at present, and I need every penny I can put my hands on. I'll have to stand by my bargain. I'm sorry for you all!

JAMES CAESAR. That's a lie, Henry Witherow, and you know well it is! You're the fine man to come here letting on to be sorry for John Ferguson when you would do anything to get him out of this. If you were sorry for him

what did you call in your money for when you knew he couldn't pay it? You know rightly you've had your heart set on the farm these years past, and you're afeard of your life he'll mebbe pay the mortgage. . . .

HENRY WITHEROW (*going to him and shaking him roughly*). I've stood enough of your back-chat, Caesar, and I'll stand no more of it.

JAMES CAESAR (*feebly*). Let me go, will you?

HENRY WITHEROW. I'll let you go when I've done with you.

HANNAH FERGUSON (*going to* WITHEROW *and striking him in the face*). Go out of this house, Henry Witherow. It's not yours yet, and till it is, there's the door to you!

HENRY WITHEROW (*throwing* CAESAR *from him so that he falls on the floor, where he lies moaning and shivering*). Heth, Hannah, you're a fine woman! You are, in sang! It's a pity to waste you on a lad like that! (*He pushes* CAESAR *with his foot.*) You ought to marry a man, Hannah, and not an old Jenny-Jo! (*He turns to* JOHN FERGUSON.) John, I'll have to have a serious talk with you in a wee while, but it's no good stopping to have it now with all this disturbance. I'll go and see M'Conkey, the lawyer, first.

JOHN FERGUSON. Very well, Henry.

HENRY WITHEROW. I'm sorry for you, but I must look after myself.

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, so you must. It's a hard thing to have to leave the home you're used to, but it can't be helped. I'm getting an old man, and I haven't much longer here. I'd like to end my days where they were begun, but . . .

HANNAH FERGUSON (*going to her father*). Don't take

on, da! There'll mebbe be a way out of it all. (*To* WITHEROW.) Mr. Witherow, will you not let the mortgage go on for a while longer? We've had a great deal of trouble lately, and my brother Andrew's not accustomed to the farm yet. If you were to give us more time, mebbe my uncle'll send the money later on . . .

HENRY WITHEROW. Ay, and mebbe he'll not. Your Uncle Andrew's not over-anxious to part with anything as far as I can see. I'm sorry, Hannah, but I can't ruin myself to oblige other people.

JOHN FERGUSON. It was to be. You can foreclose, Henry.

SARAH FERGUSON. Andrew's a poor brother to you, John, to let you be brought to this bother and you sick and sore.

JOHN FERGUSON. Poor Andrew, he must be heart-scalded at not being able to send the money. He'd have sent it if he had had it by him. I know he would. I can picture him there, not writing because he hasn't the heart to tell us he can't send the money.

[CAESAR, *who has risen from the floor, comes to* JOHN FERGUSON *and speaks almost hysterically.*

JAMES CAESAR. John, I know rightly that Witherow has set his heart on your farm. I know he has, and he's an old hypocrite if he says he's sorry for you! But I'll spite him yet, I will! I'm willing to pay off the mortgage for you if it costs me every penny I have . . .

SARAH FERGUSON (*rising and embracing him*). Oh, God reward you, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR (*putting her aside*). If Hannah 'll listen to me . . .

HENRY WITHEROW. Ay, if Hannah 'll listen to you! Huh! You'd make a bargain on your ma's coffin, Jimmy Caesar!

JAMES CAESAR (*weakly*). I don't want nothing more to say to you, Henry Witherow. Anything that passes between you and me now will come through a solicitor.

HENRY WITHEROW. Ay, you're mighty fond of the law. You'll get your fill of it one of these days. (*To* HANNAH.) Well, my bold girl, are you going to take the fine offer's been made for you here by Mr. James Caesar, Esquire. Because I'd like to know what the position is before I go. There's no good in me going to M'Conkey and incurring expense needlessly!

HANNAH FERGUSON. I bid you go before, Mr. Witherow. Will you have me bid you go again?

HENRY WITHEROW. Ah, now, quit talking!

HANNAH FERGUSON. It's well for you my da's sick and there's no man in the house to chastise you the way you deserve. I can't put you out myself, so you must stay if you won't go.

HENRY WITHEROW (*disconcerted, and beginning to bluster*). Oh, come now, Hannah, there's no need to go on like that.

HANNAH FERGUSON (*resuming her seat on the sofa*). I've said all I've got to say, Mr. Witherow. A decent man wouldn't be standing there after what I've said to you.

[*The sound of a tin whistle is heard outside.*

JAMES CAESAR. Mebbe you'll go now, Witherow!

HENRY WITHEROW. If I go, it'll not be because you ask me! (*To* HANNAH.) You've a sharp tongue in your head, Hannah! I'd like to cut a bit of it off for you! (*To* JOHN FERGUSON.) Well, John, you'll mebbe let me

know later on what course you'll take about the mortgage. I'll be up at the mill the rest of the day. Good-morning to you all!

[*He goes out.*

JAMES CAESAR. Hell to him!

[*The whistling which has persisted all this time stops suddenly, and* HENRY WITHEROW *is heard outside shouting "Get out of my road, damn you!" and then* "CLUTIE" JOHN MAGRATH, *the half-wit, is heard crying, "Ah, don't strike me,* MR. WITHEROW."

SARAH FERGUSON (*going to the door*). Ah, dear save us, he's couped "Clutie" John into the hedge!

JAMES CAESAR. That's all he can do — strike weak lads like myself, and beat poor fellows that's away in the mind like "Clutie" John!

SARAH FERGUSON (*returning to the kitchen*). Ah, well, he's not much hurt anyway! (*Her eyes are still wet with tears, and she wipes them as she sits down.*)

[*The tin whistle is heard again, and continues to be heard until* "CLUTIE" JOHN *appears at the door.*

JAMES CAESAR (*to* JOHN FERGUSON). You heard what I said, John?

JOHN FERGUSON (*picking up his Bible and preparing to read it again*). Ay, Jimmy, I heard you. You have a heart of corn! (*He reads.*) "For his anger endureth not for a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." (*To his wife, who still weeps silently.*) What are you crying for, Sarah? Do you not hear this from God's Word?

"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." That's a promise, isn't it? Dry your eyes, woman! God's got everything planned, and He knows what's best to be done. Don't be affronting Him with tears! . . .

JAMES CAESAR (*touching him*). John, did you not hear me? I was saying I'd pay the mortgage if Hannah would only listen to me . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, Jimmy, I heard you right enough, and I'm thankful to you. It's kind and neighbourly of you, but Hannah has to decide them things for herself with the help of God, not with mine. There's no good in a man and a woman marrying if they have no kindly feeling for each other. I would rather Henry Witherow foreclosed nor let Hannah do anything she didn't want to do.

HANNAH FERGUSON. Da! (*She kneels beside him.*)

JOHN FERGUSON (*drawing her close to him*). Ay, daughter?

HANNAH FERGUSON (*struggling to speak*). Da, I . . . I . . .

JAMES CAESAR (*eagerly*). I wouldn't make a hard bargain with you, John! Do you hear me, Hannah? Your da and ma could live on in the place where he was born . . .

SARAH FERGUSON. God 'll reward you, Jimmy!

[HANNAH FERGUSON *gets up from her place by her father's side. She looks at the old man for a few moments. He takes her hand in his and presses it warmly, and then smiles at her.*

JOHN FERGUSON. Whatever you think best 'll be right, Hannah!

HANNAH FERGUSON. Ay, da. (*To* JAMES CAESAR.) I thank you for your offer, Jimmy! I'll . . . I'll have you!

JOHN FERGUSON (*hoarsely*). Hannah?

HANNAH FERGUSON. I'll have him, da!

SARAH FERGUSON (*embracing her*). Oh, thank God, Hannah, thank God!

JAMES CAESAR (*uncertainly*). I can't tell you all I feel, Hannah, but I'll be a good man to you.

JOHN FERGUSON. May God bless the two of you!

[*The sound of the tin whistle grows louder.* "CLUTIE" JOHN MAGRATH *appears at the door. He is a half-wit and his age is about thirty.*

"CLUTIE" JOHN. I see you're all there!

SARAH FERGUSON. Och, away on with you, "Clutie"! We don't want you here with your whistle!

"CLUTIE" JOHN (*entering the kitchen*). Ah, now, Mrs. Ferguson, what harm does my whistle do to you? (*To* JAMES CAESAR.) Good-evening to you, Mr. Caesar!

JAMES CAESAR (*sharply*). I have nothing for you!

"CLUTIE" JOHN. That's a quare pity, Mr. Caesar! I was thinking to myself as I was coming along, "Clutie" John, if you were to meet Mr. Caesar now, he'd mebbe give you the lend of a halfpenny!"

JAMES CAESAR. Well, you were thinking wrong then, and you can just march on out of this as quick as you like. There's no money here for you.

"CLUTIE" JOHN. Ah, well, the Lord will send relief, though you won't be the honoured instrument. Sure, I'll just play a tune to you for the pleasure of the thing. (*He*

puts the whistle to his lips, and then takes it away again.) You didn't kill Mr. Witherow yet, Mr. Caesar?

JAMES CAESAR (*furiously*). Go 'long to hell out of this, will you? (*He is about to strike* "CLUTIE" JOHN, *but* MRS. FERGUSON *prevents him from doing so.*)

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, don't hurt the poor soul, Jimmy! Sure, you know rightly he's astray in the mind.

"CLUTIE" JOHN. Ay, that's true, Mrs. Ferguson! That's true enough. I'm away in the head and I ought to be locked up in the asylum! And I would be if I was worse nor I am! It's a quare pity of a man that's not distracted enough to be put in the madhouse and not wise enough to be let do what the rest of you do. It's a hard thing now that a man as harmless as myself can't be let play his whistle in peace.

JAMES CAESAR. Why don't you do some work?

"CLUTIE" JOHN. Sure, didn't I tell you I'm astray in the mind!

JAMES CAESAR. It's a nice thing when a big lump of a man like yourself goes tramping about the country playing tunes on an old whistle instead of turning your hand to something useful. You can work well enough if you like.

"CLUTIE" JOHN (*regarding his whistle affectionately*). I would rather be whistling. There's plenty can work, but few can whistle.

HANNAH FERGUSON. What do you want, "Clutie"?

"CLUTIE" JOHN. I want many's a thing that I'll never get. Did you ever hear me whistling, "Willie Reilly and his Colleen Bawn"? That's a grand tune, for all it's a Catholic tune!

JAMES CAESAR. We heard it many's a time, and we don't want to hear it again. Quit out of the place!

JOHN FERGUSON. Come here, "Clutie"! ("CLUTIE" JOHN *goes to him.*) Did you want anything to eat?

"CLUTIE" JOHN. I always want something to eat.

JOHN FERGUSON. Hannah, give him a sup of sweet milk and a piece of soda bread. Poor lad, his belly is empty many's a time.

[HANNAH *goes to get the bread and milk for* "CLUTIE."

JAMES CAESAR. It's a nice thing for her to be attending on the like of him.

JOHN FERGUSON. Why shouldn't she serve him? We're all children of the one Father, and we're serving Him when we're serving each other.

"CLUTIE" JOHN. Will I whistle a tune to you, Mr. Ferguson? (*He does not wait for permission, but begins to play "Willie Reilly and his Colleen Bawn."*)

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, quit it, will you? You'll have me deafened with your noise!

"CLUTIE" JOHN. Do you not like my whistle, Mrs. Ferguson? It's grand music. You should see the wee childher running after me when I play it. "Play us a tune, Clutie John!" they shout when I go by, and sure I just play one to them. They're quare and fond of my whistle. It's only people with bitter minds that doesn't like to hear it. (HANNAH *brings the bread and milk to him, and he puts down his whistle in order to take them from her.*) Ah, God love you, Hannah, for your kind heart!

HANNAH FERGUSON. Did Henry Witherow hurt you, "Clutie," when he couped you in the hedge?

"CLUTIE" JOHN. He did, in sang! He couped me head over heels, and me doing nothing at all to him. That's a bitter man, Hannah, that would take the bite out

of your mouth if it would bring a happorth of profit to him. He never was known to give anything to anybody, that man! It's a poor and hungry house he has. I was there one day when he was at his dinner, and he never as much as asked me had I a mouth on me at all.

JAMES CAESAR. Ay, you're right there! You are, indeed! There's no charity or loving-kindness about him.

"CLUTIE" JOHN. Well, he's not the only one in the world that's like that!

JAMES CAESAR. There's people says he sold his soul to the devil.

"CLUTIE" JOHN. Ah, why would the devil be buying souls when he can get millions of them for nothing? (*To* JOHN FERGUSON.) Did your brother Andrew send the money to pay off the mortgage, Mr. Ferguson?

JAMES CAESAR. What do you know about his brother Andrew?

"CLUTIE" JOHN. I know many's a thing! I can tell you where a kingfisher has his nest this minute. I saw a golden eagle once! It was in the West I saw it when I was whistling in Connacht. It was a great big bird with a beak on it that would tear the life out of you if it was that way inclined. (*He finishes the milk.*) This is the grand sweet milk! And the fine new bread, too! Isn't it grand now to have plenty of that? Will you not let me play a tune to you to reward you? Sure, I'll not ask you to give me the lend of a halfpenny for it, though you can if you like! I'll do it just for the pleasure of it.

JOHN FERGUSON. No, "Clutie," we can't have you playing your whistle here the night. You must go home now. We have something important to talk about.

SARAH FERGUSON. Go on, "Clutie" John! Away home with you now! We've had enough of your chat for one night. You can finish your bread in the "loanie."

JAMES CAESAR. I'm going now, Hannah. Will you walk a piece of the road with me? I've not had you a minute to myself yet with all these interruptions!

HANNAH FERGUSON (*submissively*). Very well, Jimmy!

"CLUTIE" JOHN (*astonished*). Are you going to marry him, Hannah?

HANNAH FERGUSON. Ay, "Clutie."

"CLUTIE" JOHN (*incredulously*). Ah, you're codding!

JAMES CAESAR. Come on, Hannah, and not be wasting your time talking to him! (*He goes to the door.*) Here's Andrew coming across the fields. We'd better wait and tell him.

"CLUTIE" JOHN. It'll be a great surprise for him.

SARAH FERGUSON. Ay, and great joy to him when he knows we'll not have to quit the farm after all.

[ANDREW FERGUSON *enters. He is a slight, delicate-looking lad of nineteen, nearer in looks to his father than his mother. He is very tired after his work in the fields, and he carelessly throws the bridle he is carrying into a corner of the kitchen as if he were too fatigued to put it in its proper place.*

ANDREW FERGUSON. Good-evening to you, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR. Good evening, Andrew! You're looking tired on it!

ANDREW FERGUSON (*sitting down heavily*). I am tired. How're you, da?

JOHN FERGUSON. I'm rightly, son!

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ma, can I have a drop of sweet milk to drink? I'm nearly dead with the drouth.

[MRS. FERGUSON *goes to crock to get the milk for him.*

JAMES CAESAR. Andrew, I've great news for you. Me and your sister's going to be married on it.

ANDREW FERGUSON (*starting up*). You're what? (*His mother puts a cup of milk into his hands.*) Thank you, ma!

JAMES CAESAR. Ay, we're going to be married, Andrew. Hannah's just settled it.

SARAH FERGUSON. And we'll not have to quit out of the farm after all, Andrew! Jimmy says he'll pay the mortgage off!

ANDREW FERGUSON (*vaguely*). But I thought! . . . (*He turns to* HANNAH.)

HANNAH FERGUSON (*quickly*). It's kind of Jimmy, isn't it, Andrew?

ANDREW FERGUSON (*after a pause*). Ay . . . it's kind!

JAMES CAESAR. We just stopped to tell the news to you, Andrew, to hearten you up after your day's work, and now Hannah and me's going for a bit of a dandher together. We haven't had a chance of a word by ourselves yet, and you know the way a couple likes to be by their lone, don't you? Are you ready, Hannah?

HANNAH FERGUSON. Ay.

JAMES CAESAR. Well, come on! Good-night to you all!

OMNES. Good-night, Jimmy!

"CLUTIE" JOHN. God reward you, Mr. Caesar.

JAMES CAESAR (*contemptuously*). Och, you!

[*He goes out.* HANNAH *follows him to the door.*

HANNAH FERGUSON. I won't be long before I'm back.

[*Exit.*

ANDREW FERGUSON. Da, is it true about Hannah and Jimmy?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, son, it's true. You saw them going out together.

ANDREW FERGUSON. But . . . did she do it of her own free will?

JOHN FERGUSON. Would I force her to it, Andrew?

ANDREW FERGUSON. No . . . only . . . I suppose my uncle Andrew didn't write, then?

JOHN FERGUSON. No.

ANDREW FERGUSON. I wonder what made her . . . It's a quare set-out, this!

"CLUTIE" JOHN. Did you never hear the story of the girl that killed herself over the head of love? It's a quare sad story.

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, wheesht with you, "Clutie"! Didn't I tell you before to quit out of this?

"CLUTIE" JOHN (*coaxingly*). Let me stay a wee while longer here by the fire, Mrs. Ferguson. I'll not be disturbing you.

SARAH FERGUSON. Well, close the door, then, and don't be talking so much! ("CLUTIE" JOHN *does as she bids him.*) Go up there now by the fire, and content yourself.

["CLUTIE" *sits down in a corner of the fireplace.* MRS. FERGUSON *seats herself on the sofa.*

ANDREN FERGUSON. I saw Witherow going down the "loanie." I suppose he was in here about the mortgage?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, he was. He knows about Hannah and Jimmy.

SARAH FERGUSON. There was a row between Witherow and Jimmy, and they had a bit of a scuffle. Witherow caught a holt of Jimmy and knocked him down, and then Hannah went forward and struck Witherow flat in the face. You could have knocked me down with a feather when she did it.

ANDREW FERGUSON. That was a queer thing for her to do. Mebbe she's changed her mind about him. She could hardly find a word hard enough for him one time. I suppose it's all right. It's a load off my mind anyway to hear that the farm's safe, though God knows I'm a poor hand at working it.

JOHN FERGUSON. You'll get into the way of it in a wee while, son, and mebbe I'll be able to give you more help now my mind's at ease. It's hard on you that was reared for the ministry to have to turn your hand to farming and you not used to it!

ANDREW FERGUSON. I daresay it'll do me some sort of good.

"CLUTIE" JOHN. Listen! The girl I was telling you about, the one that killed herself, it was because her boy fell out with her. That was the cause of it! She cried her eyes out to him, but it made no differs, and so she threw herself off a hill and was killed dead.

ANDREW FERGUSON. Wheesht, "Clutie"!

SARAH FERGUSON. Dear only knows where you get all them stories from that you're always telling, "Clutie"!

"CLUTIE" JOHN. I hear them in my travels.

SARAH FERGUSON. Do you never hear no comic ones?

"CLUTIE" JOHN. Ah, I can't mind the comic ones. I

just mind the sad ones. Them's the easiest to mind. They say the man was sorry afterwards when he heard tell she'd killed herself, but sure it was no use being sorry then. He should have been sorry before. It was a great lep she took.

ANDREW FERGUSON. What's Jimmy going to do about the mortgage? Is he going to take it on himself or what?

JOHN FERGUSON. I suppose so. We haven't settled anything. He said I could stay on here, your ma and me, with you to manage the farm.

SARAH FERGUSON. It's brave and kind of him to do the like.

ANDREW FERGUSON. I don't see where the kindness comes in if he gets Hannah to marry him over it! I hope to God she's not doing it just to save the farm.

JOHN FERGUSON. It was her own choice, Andrew, son. I said to her I would rather go into the Poorhouse nor have her do anything against her will. I'm not saying I'm not glad she's consented to have Jimmy, for that would be a lie. I *am* glad . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. Because the farm's safe, da?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, Andrew! (*They are silent for a few moments.*) What are you thinking, son? Are you thinking I'm letting her marry Jimmy against her will just to save the farm? Is that what you're thinking?

ANDREW FERGUSON (*evasively*). I don't know what to think, da.

JOHN FERGUSON. I left her to her own choice. Didn't I, Sarah?

SARAH FERGUSON. Ay, John, you did, and sure what does it matter anyway? She's a young slip of a girl with wayward fancies in her head, mebbe, but Jimmy's as good

and substantial a man as she's like to get, and he'll be a good husband to her. It's a great thing for a girl to get a comfortable home to go to when she leaves the one she was reared in. There's plenty of young women does be running after this and running after that, but sure there's nothing in the end to beat a kind man and a good home where the money is easy and regular.

ANDREW FERGUSON. It's easy to be saying that, ma, when you're past your desires.

SARAH FERGUSON. I got my desire, Andrew, when I got your da. I never desired no one else but him.

ANDREW FERGUSON. Would you like to have married Jimmy Caesar if he'd been your match when you were Hannah's age?

SARAH FERGUSON. There was never no question of me marrying any one but your da . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. But if there had — if your da's farm had been mortgaged like this one? . . .

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, what's the good of if-ing and supposing? There's a deal too much of that goes on in this house. And, anyway, we can't let your da be turned out of his home.

ANDREW FERGUSON. Then that *is* the reason! Hannah's marrying Jimmy Caesar for our sakes, not for her own!

JOHN FERGUSON. No, no, Andrew, son, that's not it. I tell you she took him of her own free will. I wouldn't put no compulsion on her . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. No, da, I know you wouldn't; but are you sure you're not ready to believe she's taking him of her own free will just because she says she is?

SARAH FERGUSON. Sure, what else can he do?

JOHN FERGUSON. God knows, Andrew, it'll hurt me sore to leave this house, but I'd go gladly out of it sooner nor cause Hannah a moment's unhappiness. I'm trying hard to do what's right. I don't think I'm acting hypocritically, and I'm not deceiving myself . . .

[*The door opens suddenly, and* HANNAH *enters in a state of agitation. She closes the door behind her, and then stands with her face to it. She begins to sob without restraint.*

JOHN FERGUSON (*rising from his chair*). What is it, daughter?

ANDREW FERGUSON (*going to her*). Hannah!

SARAH FERGUSON. Don't bother her! (*Going to her and drawing her into her arms.*) There, Hannah, dear, don't disturb yourself, daughter. (*To the others.*) She's overwrought with the excitement. That's what it is! (*To* HANNAH.) Come and sit down, dear!

[*She draws* HANNAH *towards the sofa, where they both sit down.* HANNAH *buries her face in her mother's shoulder and sobs bitterly.*

SARAH FERGUSON. Control yourself, daughter! You're all right now! No one'll harm you here!

JOHN FERGUSON. Are you not well, Hannah?

ANDREW FERGUSON (*coming close to his mother and sister*). Hannah, do you not want to marry Jimmy Caesar?

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, wheesht with you, Andrew, and not be putting notions into her head! It's just overwrought she is. You know well she's been as anxious about the farm as any of us, and about your da, too, and

she bore the bother well, but now that it's all settled, she's had to give way. Sure, that's natural! There, daughter, dear, just cry away till you're better. (*She soothes* HANNAH *as she speaks to her.*)

JOHN FERGUSON (*kicking the rug from his legs and going unsteadily to his wife and daughter*). Hannah! (HANNAH, *still sobbing, does not reply.*) Hannah, daughter, do you hear me?

HANNAH FERGUSON (*without raising her head*). Ay, da!

JOHN FERGUSON. Listen to me a while! (*He tries to raise her face to his.*) Look up at me, daughter! (*She turns towards him.*) Don't cry, Hannah! I can't bear to see you crying, dear! (*He makes her stand up, and then he clasps her to him.*) Listen to me, Hannah! I've never deceived you nor been unjust to you, have I, daughter?

HANNAH FERGUSON. No, da.

JOHN FERGUSON. And you know I'd beg my bread from door to door sooner nor hurt you, don't you? Isn't that true?

HANNAH FERGUSON. Ay, da, it is.

JOHN FERGUSON. Well, don't be afeard to say what's in your mind, then! What is it that's upsetting you?

HANNAH FERGUSON (*putting her arms about his neck, and drawing herself closer to him.*) Oh, da, I can't . . . I can't! . . .

SARAH FERGUSON. You can't what?

JOHN FERGUSON. Do you not want to marry Jimmy?

HANNAH FERGUSON (*sobbing anew*). I can't thole him, da! . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. Very well, daughter! That'll be all

right! Don't annoy yourself no more about him, dear. It'll be all right.

HANNAH FERGUSON. I tried hard to want him, da, but I couldn't, and when he bid me good-night and tried to kiss me out in the "loanie," I near died! . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. I know, daughter.

SARAH FERGUSON (*starting up in fear and anger*). But you promised him, Hannah! John, you're never going to let her break her word to the man? . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. Wheesht, woman!

SARAH FERGUSON (*to her son*). Andrew! . . . (*She sees that* ANDREW'S *sympathies are with* HANNAH.) Hannah, think shame of yourself!

HANNAH FERGUSON. I can't take him, ma, I can't!

SARAH FERGUSON. Do you want to see your da turned out of the home he was born in, and him old and sick and not able to help himself?

JOHN FERGUSON (*angrily*). Quit it, woman, when I tell you!

SARAH FERGUSON. What's wrong with the man that she won't take him? There isn't a decenter, quieter fellow in the place, and him never took drink nor played devil's cards in his life. There's plenty of girls would give the two eyes out of their head to have the chance of him. Martha M'Clurg and Ann Close and Maggie M'Conkey, the whole lot of them, would jump with joy if he was to give a word to them (*she turns on* HANNAH), and what call have you to be setting yourself up when a decent, quiet man offers for you, and you knowing all that depends on it?

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ma, that's no way to talk to her!

SARAH FERGUSON. I'll say what I want to say.

ANDREW FERGUSON. You'll say no more. If I hear you speaking another word to her like that, I'll walk out of the door and never come back again.

SARAH FERGUSON (*sitting down and weeping helplessly*). Oh, you're all again' me, your da and Hannah and you! I'll have to quit the house I was brought to when I was a young girl, and mebbe live in a wee house in the town or go into the Union!

JOHN FERGUSON (*putting* HANNAH *into his chair*). Sit down, daughter, and quieten yourself. (*To his wife.*) If we have to go into the Poorhouse, Sarah, we'll have to go. (*To his son.*) Put on your top-coat, Andrew, and go up to Witherow's and tell him he can take the farm . . .

HANNAH FERGUSON (*recovering herself slightly*). No, da, no. I'm all right again. I'll marry Jimmy! I'm ashamed of the way I went on just now. My ma was right. It was just the upset that made me like it.

SARAH FERGUSON. Ay, daughter, that was it.

JOHN FERGUSON. Wheesht, Sarah. Go on, Andrew.

ANDREW FERGUSON. All right, da.

SARAH FERGUSON (*angrily*). Let her go herself and finish her work! The lad's wore out with tiredness . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. I'm not that tired, ma.

HANNAH FERGUSON (*firmly*). I'll go, Andrew. It'll quieten me down to have the walk. (*To her father.*) Jimmy doesn't know yet, da. I didn't tell him, and he's coming up here the night after he shuts his shop. Mebbe you'll tell him before I come back? . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. All right, daughter, I will. (*To* ANDREW.) Hannah'll go, Andrew. She doesn't want to be here when Jimmy comes. (*To* HANNAH.) Put a

shawl over your head, daughter, and wrap yourself well from the night-air.

HANNAH FERGUSON. Ay, da!

[*She goes upstairs to make herself ready to go out.* "CLUTIE" JOHN *makes a faint sound on his whistle.*

JOHN FERGUSON. Ah, are you still there, "Clutie" John? I'd near forgot about you.

"CLUTIE" JOHN. Will I play "Willie Reilly and his Colleen Bawn" to you?

JOHN FERGUSON. No, boy, not the night. Just keep quiet there in the heat of the fire.

"CLUTIE" JOHN. It's a brave warm fire. It's well to be them that has a good fire whenever they want it.

[HANNAH, *wearing a shawl over her head, comes downstairs and goes across the kitchen to the door.*

JOHN FERGUSON. You'll not be long, Hannah?

HANNAH FERGUSON. No, da.

[*She opens the door and goes out, closing it behind her.*

JOHN FERGUSON. I wonder will Witherow let the farm to some one else or will he till it himself?

ANDREW FERGUSON. He'll mebbe till it himself.

SARAH FERGUSON. I'd better be laying the supper for you all. Is "Clutie" John to have his here?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, let him have a bite to eat. We'll mebbe not be able to . . . (*He breaks off suddenly and turns to his son.*) Light the lamp, Andrew, and draw the blinds. [*He seats himself again in his chair.*

ANDREW FERGUSON. Draw the blinds, "Clutie."

[*He lights the lamp while* "CLUTIE" *draws the blinds and* MRS. FERGUSON *lays the table for supper.*

ANDREW FERGUSON. I wonder what time Jimmy'll come.

JOHN FERGUSON. I hope he'll come soon so that he won't be here when Hannah comes back.

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ay. Will I set the lamp near your elbow, da?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, son, and reach the Bible to me, if you please. (ANDREW *hands the Bible to him.*) Thank you, son.

ACT II

It is more than an hour later, and it is quite dark outside. JOHN FERGUSON *and his wife and son are sitting at the table, eating their supper.* "CLUTIE" JOHN MCGRATH *is still seated in the corner of the fireplace. He has laid his whistle aside and is engaged in eating the supper given to him by* MRS. FERGUSON.

SARAH FERGUSON. Hannah's gey and long in getting back from Witherow's.

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay.

SARAH FERGUSON. I wonder did she change her mind about Jimmy and go to the shop instead of going to Witherow's. It's quare him not coming before this!

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ah, I don't think she'd do that. Hannah's not the sort to change sudden.

SARAH FERGUSON. Well, she changed sudden enough the night!

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ah, that was because she was doing something she didn't want to do.

SARAH FERGUSON. Well, if she hasn't changed her mind, and Jimmy comes now, we'll have to give him his supper, and then Hannah'll mebbe be here before he goes away again. It'll be quare and awkward for us all.

ANDREW FERGUSON. Well, sure, you can tell him when he comes, and then he'll not be wanting to stop to his supper.

SARAH FERGUSON. Och, we'd have to offer the man

something to eat anyway! It's only neighbourly to do that much. (*She turns to* "CLUTIE" JOHN.) Will you have some more tea, "Clutie"?

"CLUTIE" JOHN. Ay, if you please, Mrs. Ferguson. It's quare nice tea. I don't often get the like of that any place I go.

ANDREW FERGUSON. It's a quare thing to me the way Jimmy runs after Hannah, and her showing him plain enough that she never had any regard for him.

"CLUTIE" JOHN. 'Deed, Andrew, there's many a thing in the world is quarer nor that. It's a quare thing now for a man to be blowing wind into a bit of a pipe and it to be making up tunes for him. That's quare if you like!

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, you're daft about that old whistle of yours! (*She hands a cup of tea to him.*) Here, drink up that, and don't talk so much! I suppose I'll have to let you sleep in the loft the night?

"CLUTIE" JOHN. Sure, that'll be a grand bed for me, lying on the hay.

SARAH FERGUSON. I do believe you're not such a fool as you make out, "Clutie"! You've the fine knack of getting into people's houses and making them give you your meals and a bed without them meaning to do it!

"CLUTIE" JOHN. I don't try to make them do it, Mrs. FERGUSON. I just come in the house and sit down. That's all I do.

SARAH FERGUSON. Ay, that's all you do. If you did any more, they'd mebbe have to keep you for the rest of your life! Once you're settled down, it's hard to persuade you to get up again.

"CLUTIE" JOHN. You're letting on you're vexed with

me, Mrs. Ferguson, but sure I know rightly you're not. A woman that has as kind a heart as you have . . .

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, wheesht with your talk! Will I cut another piece for you?

"CLUTIE" JOHN. Ay, if you please!

[*She cuts a piece of bread and gives it to him.*

ANDREW FERGUSON. I wonder, da, would you be willing to go up to Belfast to live? I think I could mebbe get a place in a linen office there, and I daresay Hannah might get work in a wareroom or a shop. Between the two of us, we could keep my ma and you rightly.

JOHN FERGUSON. I'd be as willing to go there as anywhere, son, if I have to quit out of this.

ANDREW FERGUSON. When I was thinking of going into the ministry, I got acquainted with a young fellow named M'Kinstry that was very well connected. His da kept a linen mill in Belfast, and I daresay he'd be willing to put a word in for me if I was to ask him.

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay.

ANDREW FERGUSON. I think I'll go up to Belfast on Saturday and see young M'Kinstry. I'll write a letter to him the night to tell him I'm coming, and I'll just let him know the position of things so that he can tell his da about me.

SARAH FERGUSON (*to* ANDREW). Will I pour you out a wee drop more tea, son?

ANDREW FERGUSON. Thank you, ma!

[*She takes his cup and fills it, and then passes it back to him.*

JOHN FERGUSON. Who knows but my health will be better in Belfast nor it has been here? I'm not sure, when I think of it, but the mists that lie on the hills at

night are bad for me. They say there's a fine air in Belfast blowing up the Lough from the sea.

[*There is a knock at the door.*

SARAH FERGUSON. There's some one at the door now. It'll either be Hannah or Jimmy. "Clutie" John, away and open it, will you?

["CLUTIE" JOHN *goes to the door and opens it.* JAMES CAESAR *steps in. The assured manner which he assumed when* HANNAH *accepted him has become more pronounced.*

JAMES CAESAR. I'm later nor I expected to be. (*He turns to* "CLUTIE.") Here, "Clutie," help me off with my coat, will you? ("CLUTIE" JOHN *helps him to take off his overcoat.*) It's turned a bit cold the night! (*To* "CLUTIE.") Hang it up there on the rack, "Clutie." ("CLUTIE" *does as he is bid, and then goes to his seat by the fire.*) I thought it would be as well to wear my top-coat, for you get quare and damp coming up the loanie in the mist! (*He goes to the fire and rubs his hands in the warmth.*) Where's Hannah?

SARAH FERGUSON. She's out, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR. Out, is she? It's very late for her to be out! She'll have to keep better hours nor this when she's married, eh? (*His attempt to be jovial falls heavy.*) Has she not had her supper yet?

SARAH FERGUSON. No, not yet. We're expecting her in every while.

JAMES CAESAR. I hope she'll not be long. I want to discuss the wedding with her . . .

SARAH FERGUSON. The wedding!

JAMES CAESAR. Ay. Sure, there's no sense in our waiting long, is there? If people's able to get married, they ought to get the ceremony over quick. That's what I think, Mrs. Ferguson. Och, listen to me calling you Mrs. Ferguson, just like a stranger! I ought to start calling you "Ma" to get into the way of it, or would you rather I called you "Mother"?

SARAH FERGUSON (*nervously*). I'm not particular, Jimmy.

JAMES CAESAR. Some people's quare and particular about a thing like that. They think it's common to say "ma" and "da," and they never let their children call them anything but "father" and "mother." I knew a family once up in Belfast that always called their parents "papa" and "mamma." It was quare and conceited of them — just as if they were English or anything like that.

JOHN FERGUSON. Jimmy, I want to say something to you!

JAMES CAESAR. Ay, John! (*Jovially.*) I can't start calling you "da" or "papa" or anything else but John, can I? (*To* MRS. FERGUSON.) Do you know, I'm near dead of the drouth! If you could spare me a wee drop of tea! . . .

SARAH FERGUSON (*rising and speaking hurriedly*). Of course, Jimmy, I will. I don't know what I'm thinking about not to ask you to sit down to your supper. (*She goes to the dresser for a cup and saucer.*) Draw a chair up to the table, will you, and sit down!

JAMES CAESAR. Ah, now, I don't want to be putting you to any inconvenience.

SARAH FERGUSON. Sure, it's no bother at all. Just

come and content yourself. I'm all throughother with the ups and downs we've had this day, and my manners is all shattered over the head of it. Sit down here.

JAMES CAESAR (*taking his place at the table*). Thank you, ma.

SARAH FERGUSON. Will you have soda-bread or wheaten?

JAMES CAESAR. Wheaten, if you please!

[ANDREW FERGUSON *rises from the table and goes to the side of the fire opposite to that on which* "CLUTIE" JOHN *is seated.*

SARAH FERGUSON. Help yourself to anything you want.

JAMES CAESAR. Thank you! (*He bows his head.*) Thank God for this meal, Amen! (*To* JOHN FERGUSON.) I've been making plans in my head, John, about the future of the farm.

JOHN FERGUSON. Jimmy, I want to say something to you! . . .

JAMES CAESAR (*slightly impatient*). Ay, but wait till I tell you about my plans! Now, how would it be if you were to let the land by itself, and you and the rest of you stay on in the house? Me and Hannah'll be getting married in a wee while, and there'll only be the three of you left . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. Jimmy! . . .

JAMES CAESAR. Now, let me get it all out before I forget any of it. Andrew could mebbe resume his studies for the ministry. I might be able to advance him the money for it.

ANDREW FERGUSON. That's a kindly thought, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR. Ah, I've often thought I would like to be related to a minister. It looks well to be able to say

the Reverend Mr. So-and-So is your brother-in-law, particular if he's a well-known man such as you might be yourself, Andrew. Or I was thinking if you didn't fancy the ministry any more, mebbe you'd come into the shop and learn the grocery! The fact is, betwixt ourselves, I'm thinking seriously of opening a branch establishment over at Ballymaclurg, and if I had you trained under me, Andrew, you'd do rightly as the manager of it.

JOHN FERGUSON. Jimmy, I'll never be able to thank you sufficient for your kindness . . .

JAMES CAESAR. Ah, don't mention it! Sure, it's a pleasure, and anyway it's in the family, you might say! I wonder what's keeping Hannah! Where is she at all?

JOHN FERGUSON. Jimmy . . . Hannah's changed her mind!

JAMES CAESAR. Changed her mind! What do you mean?

JOHN FERGUSON. She's changed her mind, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR (*getting up and going to him: the assured manner has dropped from him*). Do you mean she doesn't want to marry me no more?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, that's what I mean.

JAMES CAESAR. But! . . . Ah, quit your codding, for dear sake! (*He goes back to his seat and begins to eat again.*) You've been letting "Clutie" John put you up to this — trying to scare me. I wouldn't wonder but Hannah's upstairs all the while, splitting her sides . . . (*He gets up and goes to the foot of the staircase and calls up it.*) Hi, Hannah, are you there?

"CLUTIE" JOHN. I never put them up to anything, Mr. Caesar. It's not my nature to do a thing like that.

JAMES CAESAR (*calling up the stairs*). Come on down out of that, Hannah, and not be tormenting me!

JOHN FERGUSON. She's not there, Jimmy.

JAMES CAESAR (*coming back to the table*). Are you in earnest, John?

JOHN FERGUSON. I am, Jimmy. I'm quare and sorry for you . . .

JAMES CAESAR. But she gave her promise to me an hour ago! You heard her yourself!

JOHN FERGUSON. I know, but she's changed her mind since.

JAMES CAESAR. What's come over her?

JOHN FERGUSON. I can't tell you, Jimmy. She just didn't feel that she could go on with the match. It's a thing that you can't explain, Jimmy.

JAMES CAESAR. But . . . the farm . . . and the mortgage!

JOHN FERGUSON. When I saw the way her mind was set, I told her to go up to Witherow's and tell him to foreclose!

JAMES CAESAR. But, man alive! . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. That's the way of it, Jimmy. I'm heartsore about it, but it can't be helped, can it?

JAMES CAESAR (*angrily*). Do you mean to sit there and tell me you're going to let her treat me like dirt beneath her feet after the way I've offered to help you?

JOHN FERGUSON. I can't force her to do things against her will, Jimmy. No good would come of the like of that either to her or to you.

JAMES CAESAR. I suppose you never thought of my position, John Ferguson? I've told all my neighbours

already that Hannah and me are to be married, and now I'll have to tell them that she won't have me!

ANDREW FERGUSON. My da can't help it, can he, if Hannah doesn't want to marry you?

JAMES CAESAR. What'll Witherow say when he hears about it? My God, he'll be the first to know! (*He becomes wild with rage as this idea expands in his mind.*) Had you no consideration at all, the whole pack of you? I was willing to cripple myself to get you out of your difficulty, and then you turn on me and affront me before the man I hate most in the world! That's kindness for you! That's the reward a man gets for being neighbourly!

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, you may well complain, Jimmy! I'm not denying your right to do so. I'd have spared you from this if I could.

JAMES CAESAR. Can't you make her keep her promise to me? A man has the right to be respected by his own child, and if she doesn't obey you and do what you tell her, you should make her.

ANDREW FERGUSON. Would you marry a woman that doesn't want you?

JAMES CAESAR (*fiercely*). I want her, don't I? What does it matter to me whether she wants me or not so long as I'm married to her? My heart's hungry for her! (*His ferocity passes into complaint.*) Don't I know rightly she doesn't want me? But what does that matter to me? I've loved her since she was a wee child, and I'd be happy with her if she was never to give me a kind look. Many and many a time, when the shop was closed, I went and sat out there in the fields and imagined her and me

married together and living happy, us with two or three wee children, and them growing up fine and strong. I could see her them times walking about in a fine silk dress, and looking grand on it, and all the neighbours nudging each other and saying the fine woman she was and the well we must be getting on in the world for her to be able to dress herself that nice! I could hardly bear it when I used to meet her afterwards, and she hadn't hardly a civil word for me; but I couldn't keep out of her way for all that; and many's a time I run quick and dodged round corners so's I should meet her again and have the pleasure of looking at her. When she said she'd have me, I could feel big lumps rolling off me, and I was light-hearted and happy for all I knew she was only consenting to have me to save your farm, John. I had my heart's desire, and I never felt so like a man before! . . . And now! . . .

[*He rests his head on the table and begins to sob.*

SARAH FERGUSON (*in anguish*). I can't bear to see a man crying! (*She goes to* JIMMY.) Quit, Jimmy, son! It'll mebbe be all right in the end. Don't disturb yourself so much, man!

ANDREW FERGUSON (*contemptuously*). There's no sense in going on that way!

JOHN FERGUSON. Don't speak to him, Andrew! Leave the man to his grief!

JAMES CAESAR (*looking up, and addressing* ANDREW). I know rightly I'm making a poor show of myself, but I can't help it. Wouldn't anybody that's had the life that I've had do the same as me? You're right and fine, Andrew, and full of your talk, but wait till you've had to

bear what I have, and you'll see then what you'll do when something good that you've longed for all your life comes to you and then is taken from you. (*He rises from the table, trying to recover himself and speak in an ordinary voice.*) I'm sorry I bothered you all! I'll not trouble you with my company any longer. It'll be better for me to be going nor to be here when she comes back. (*He moves towards the door.*) I said some harsh words to you, John! . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. I'm not minding them, Jimmy. I know well the state you're in.

JAMES CAESAR. I'm sorry I said them to you, all the same. It was in anger I said them . . .

[" CLUTIE " JOHN *starts up from his seat in the corner, and holds up his hand for silence.*

" CLUTIE " JOHN. Wheesht!

SARAH FERGUSON. What is it, " Clutie "?

" CLUTIE " JOHN. Wheesht, wheesht!

[*He goes to the door and opens, while the others stand staring at him. He listens for a moment or two, and then he darts swiftly into the darkness.*

SARAH FERGUSON. In the name of God, what ails the fellow?

ANDREW FERGUSON (*going to the door*). He's heard something.

SARAH FERGUSON (*drawing a blind and peering out*). Oh, what is it?

ANDREW FERGUSON (*looking out*). I can't see anything . . . Wait! (*He pauses a moment.*) There's some one coming up the " loanie." I hear steps . . .

JAMES CAESAR (*coming to his side and listening*). It's some one running!

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ay! . . . It's Hannah! (*He shouts to his sister.*) What ails you, Hannah?

JAMES CAESAR. I hope nothing's happened to her.

SARAH FERGUSON. She must have been scared or something.

[*She goes to the door and stands beside* CAESAR. ANDREW FERGUSON *is heard outside speaking inquiries to his sister. Then* CAESAR *and* MRS. FERGUSON *come away from the door into the kitchen, and* HANNAH, *in a state of terrible agitation, appears in the doorway. She pauses wildly for a moment, glancing round the room without seeing anything because of the sudden change from darkness to light.*

SARAH FERGUSON. Hannah, what ails you, dear?

[HANNAH *goes quickly to her father and throws herself against his knees.*

HANNAH FERGUSON. Da, da!

JOHN FERGUSON. What is it, daughter? What is it?

[ANDREW FERGUSON, *followed by* "CLUTIE" JOHN, *returns to the kitchen. He closes the door.*

ANDREW FERGUSON. What ails her? Has she hurt herself?

JOHN FERGUSON. Hannah! (*He tries to lift her face to his, but she resists him.*) Hannah, what is it? Tell me, daughter!

HANNAH FERGUSON (*brokenly*). Da, da, I can't! . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. You can't what, Hannah?

HANNAH FERGUSON. It's . . . it's fearful, da!

JAMES CAESAR. Has any one harmed her? Hannah, has any one harmed you? (*To* JOHN FERGUSON.) She was at Witherow's, wasn't she? (*Turning to the others.*) That's where she was — at Witherow's! (*To* HANNAH.) Hannah, do you hear me, girl? Has any one harmed you? Was it Witherow?

HANNAH FERGUSON. I can't . . . can't . . .

JAMES CAESAR. You must tell us. (*Looking wildly about him.*) My God, I'll go mad if any harm's happened to her!

ANDREW FERGUSON (*taking hold of his arm and leading him away from* HANNAH). Quieten yourself, Jimmy. She'll tell us in a minute when she's herself again.

JOHN FERGUSON. Hannah, dear! Come closer to me, daughter! (*He lifts her head from his knees and draws her up so that her face rests against his.*) Just keep quiet, daughter! No one'll harm you here. Keep quite quiet! (*To* JAMES CAESAR.) She was always a wee bit afeard of the dark, for she has a great imagination, and she mebbe thought she saw something fearful in the night. Get her a wee sup of sweet milk, one of you! (MRS. FERGUSON *goes to get the milk for her.*) It's mebbe nothing but fright. I've seen her as startled as this once before when she was a child. (HANNAH *gives a great sob, and starts a little.*) There, daughter, you needn't be scared! You're safe here from any harm. (MRS. FERGUSON *brings a cup of milk to him.*) Thank you, Sarah! Here, Hannah, drink a wee sup of this! It'll do you good!

HANNAH FERGUSON (*clinging closer to him*). No, da, no!

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, daughter, it'll help to steady you! (*He puts the cup to her lips, and she drinks some of the milk.*) That's right! That's right! You'll have a wee drop more, now! (*She averts her head.*) Ay, daughter, just have some more, and then you'll mebbe be quieter in yourself. (*He compels her to drink some more of the milk, and then he puts the cup away.*) That'll do you a power of good! (*He draws her head down to his breast.*) Just rest your head on me, daughter, and keep still!

"CLUTIE" JOHN. She was crying bitter out there. She was running up the "loanie" when I found her, and she let a screech out of her when I touched her arm, and then she run that hard I couldn't keep pace with her. It must have been a fearful thing that scared her that way!

SARAH FERGUSON. I hope to my goodness it's no more sorrow for us. We've had more nor our share already.

JOHN FERGUSON. Wheesht, wheesht, woman. Wheesht!

JAMES CAESAR. If Witherow's harmed her, I'll kill him. I will, so help me, God!

JOHN FERGUSON. Quit, quit! (*To* HANNAH.) Are you better now, Hannah? (*She still sobs a little, but her agitation has subsided, and she is now able to speak more or less coherently.*) Just tell me, daughter. What happened you?

HANNAH FERGUSON. Da, I'm ashamed! . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. Ashamed, daughter!

SARAH FERGUSON. She said she was ashamed! Oh, my God!

JOHN FERGUSON. What are you ashamed of, daughter?

HANNAH FERGUSON. I . . . (*She relapses.*) I can't tell you, da, I can't tell you!

JAMES CAESAR. Was it Witherow, Hannah?

JOHN FERGUSON. Don't bother her, Jimmy?

JAMES CAESAR. I know it was Witherow, I know it was him!

JOHN FERGUSON. Hannah! Look up, daughter!

HANNAH FERGUSON. Yes, da!

JOHN FERGUSON. Tell me about it!

HANNAH FERGUSON (*making an effort to control herself, now and then she speaks brokenly.*) I went up to Witherow's farm, the way you told me, and there were two people waiting to talk to him.

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay.

HANNAH FERGUSON. He kept me waiting till after he had done with them. I told him we couldn't pay the money and he was to foreclose, and then he begun laughing at me and making a mock of . . . of Jimmy . . .

[*She looks up and sees* CAESAR *and hesitates to finish her sentence.*

JAMES CAESAR. Was it me he made a mock of? (*To* JOHN FERGUSON.) Ah, didn't I tell you what he would do? Didn't I, now? (*He turns to the others.*) Didn't I, Mrs. Ferguson? . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. Go on, daughter!

HANNAH FERGUSON. He said he supposed it couldn't be helped, and I was just coming away when he said he would walk the length of the "loanie" with me, and I waited for him. (*Her voice grows feeble.*) We were walking along, talking about one thing and another . . .

JOHN FERGUSON (*nervously*). Ay, ay!

HANNAH FERGUSON. And he begun telling me what a fine girl I am, and wishing he could kiss me! . . .

JAMES CAESAR. God starve him!

HANNAH FERGUSON. And then he tried to kiss me, but

I wouldn't let him. We were going over Musgrave's meadow together, and all of a sudden he put his arms round me and threw me down! . . . Oh, da, da!

[*Her grief overcomes her again, and she buries her head against his breast and is unable to speak further.*

JAMES CAESAR. What did she say, John? What was it she said?

JOHN FERGUSON (*brokenly*). I can't speak, Jimmy — I can't speak. Hannah, dear! [*He tries to comfort her.*

JAMES CAESAR. Did he wrong her? That's what I want to know!

SARAH FERGUSON. Oh, will we never have comfort in the world! John, does she mean that he harmed her . . . *harmed* her? (*Wildly to the others.*) One of you do something! Andrew! Jimmy!!

JAMES CAESAR. I've swore many's a time to have his life and never done it. I was a poor, trembling creature, but I'll tremble no more! (*He goes to the door.*) Good-night to you all!

JOHN FERGUSON. Where are you going, Jimmy?

JAMES CAESAR. I'm going — somewhere!

JOHN FERGUSON. Sit down, Jimmy . . .

JAMES CAESAR. It's no good you talking to me, John!

[*He opens the door violently and goes out.*

JOHN FERGUSON. Andrew, go after him and bring him back. There's enough harm done already. Go and stop him, son!

[ANDREW *goes unwillingly to the door. He stands there looking up the dark "loanie."*

ANDREW FERGUSON. I can't see him!

JOHN FERGUSON. You must be able to see him. He can't be that far! Go after him, man, and bring him back here.

ANDREW FERGUSON. No, da, I won't. (*He shuts the door and returns to his seat.*) The man has a right to be left to himself.

JOHN FERGUSON. Andrew! (*He tries to get up from his chair, but* HANNAH'S *weight prevents him.*) Here, Sarah, take Hannah and put her to bed. Get up, daughter!

HANNAH FERGUSON (*clinging to him*). Da, da!

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, daughter, ay! God's scourged us hard, and it isn't easy to bear. We must just . . . just try and be patient. (*Kissing her.*) Go to your ma, dear, and let her take care of you!

SARAH FERGUSON. Come to your bed, Hannah!

[HANNAH'S *anguish unbalances her, and she becomes hysterical, and stands clinging to her father and weeping bitterly.*

JOHN FERGUSON (*comforting her*). You must control yourself, daughter. Go with your ma, now, like a good girl. Take her, Sarah!

[MRS. FERGUSON *leads her daughter towards the stairs. They go out.*

ANDREW FERGUSON. I hope Jimmy'll kill him.

JOHN FERGUSON (*weakly*). Son, son, don't talk that way!

ANDREW FERGUSON. I can't help it, da. He ought to be killed. He's not fit to live.

JOHN FERGUSON. Are you setting yourself up to judge God's work?

ANDREW FERGUSON. An eye for an eye, da, and a tooth for a tooth!

JOHN FERGUSON. That's not the spirit that lives now, son! That's the spirit that was destroyed on the Cross. If a man does an injury to you, and you injure him back, you're as bad as he is. You have your own work to do in the world, and you must leave God to do His; it's His work to judge, not ours! (*His utterance exhausts him a little, and he staggers back into his chair. His voice changes to a pleading note.*) Ah, Andrew, son, don't never talk that way again! I meant you for the ministry, to teach people how to live for God! You can't go into the ministry now, son, but you can teach people just the same. Just the same! I would rather you were dead nor hear you speak about Jimmy Caesar the way you're doing . . . (*He gets up from his chair and goes to his son, taking him by the shoulder.*) Will you not go out and look for him, son? He has suffered enough, poor man, without him damning his soul!

ANDREW FERGUSON. He can bear God's strokes as well as we can!

JOHN FERGUSON. Your heart's bitter, son! I wish I could go! (*He staggers towards the door.*) I haven't the strength I used to have . . . Andrew, will you not do as I bid you?

ANDREW FERGUSON. No, da, I won't interfere between them.

JOHN FERGUSON. I must go myself, then. I must try and find him . . .

[MRS. FERGUSON *comes down the stairs into the kitchen.*

SARAH FERGUSON. John!

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, woman!

SARAH FERGUSON. Hannah wants you. She'll not be quiet without you near her.

JOHN FERGUSON. I can't go up to her yet, Sarah. I'm going out to look for Jimmy Caesar. I can't let him be wandering about wild in the night. If he finds Witherow he'll mebbe do him an injury. (*He turns towards the door again.*) Andrew won't go, so I must. I can't let the man destroy himself.

SARAH FERGUSON. What way's that to be talking and you the sick you are? Is it your death you're wanting? And no coat on or nothing. (*To her son.*) Andrew, think shame of yourself to be letting your da go out in the dark and damp! (*To her husband.*) You must come to Hannah. She won't keep still without you! (*To* ANDREW.) You go and look for Jimmy, Andrew. The poor creature's near distracted mad, and dear knows in that state he might do something fearful.

ANDREW FERGUSON (*sullenly*). I'm not going, ma. I've told my da that already.

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, aren't you headstrong? (*To her husband.*) Come up to Hannah first, John!

JOHN FERGUSON. She must wait till I come back. It's Jimmy Caesar that's in the greatest danger now. I'll come to her when I get back, tell her!

SARAH FERGUSON. You'll rue this night, the pair of you, but you must have your own way, I suppose!

JOHN FERGUSON. Give me my coat, woman! (MRS. FERGUSON *goes to get his coat for him.*) Andrew, will you not come with me and help me to find him?

ANDREW FERGUSON. I'll not budge out of the door, da. I wouldn't lift a finger to stop him from doing anything

he wants to do. (MRS. FERGUSON *returns to the kitchen carrying a jacket, a topcoat, and a muffler.*) It's no business of mine to interfere between them.

SARAH FERGUSON (*helping her husband into his coat*). Muffle yourself up well, John. It's cold the night.

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, Sarah, thank you.

[*He puts the muffler round his throat.*

ANDREW FERGUSON. I only hope Jimmy'll have the manhood to kill Witherow!

JOHN FERGUSON (*in pain*). Wheesht, wheesht, son! Wheesht, adear! (*He recovers himself, and turns to his wife.*) Tell Hannah where I'm gone, Sarah! That'll mebbe keep her quiet till I get back! (*He opens the door.*) I'll come as soon as I can!

[*He goes out, closing the door behind him.*

SARAH FERGUSON. It'll kill him, this night's work! Andrew, how can you stand there and see your da going out in the wet and dark, and you knowing well the sick and feeble he is!

ANDREW FERGUSON. I can't stop him from going, can I?

SARAH FERGUSON. You could have gone yourself.

ANDREW FERGUSON (*turning to her and speaking fiercely*). I tell you I don't want to stop Jimmy from killing Witherow if he's going to do it. It's right that he should kill him. The man's bad from head to foot. Everything about him shows that! It isn't only the way he's treated us, but others too. You've told me yourself many's a time, and my da's told me too, of the cuts and insults Jimmy's had to bear from him! Isn't this greater nor the lot of them put together? Hasn't Jimmy a right to turn on him now if he never had the right before? I

don't care what my da says! Jimmy has the right to turn on him and kill him if he can.

SARAH FERGUSON (*bewildered by the catastrophe in which she is involved*). I'm all moidhered by it. I don't understand what's happening. Your da says it's the will of God, but I . . . I can't make it out . . . (*She goes towards the stairs.*) I'll mebbe not come down again, Andrew. Good-night, son!

ANDREW FERGUSON. Good-night, ma!

[MRS. FERGUSON *goes upstairs.* ANDREW *walks across the room and opens the door. He looks out for a moment or two. Then he shuts the door and walks back to the fireplace.*

"CLUTIE" JOHN. Your da's a forgiving man, Andrew!

ANDREW FERGUSON (*absently*). Eh?

"CLUTIE" JOHN. I say, your da's a forgiving man!

ANDREW FERGUSON (*carelessly*). Oh, ay. Ay!

[*He walks across the room and back again.*

"CLUTIE" JOHN. You're not a forgiving man, are you, Andrew?

[ANDREW *sits down at the table, with his face to the audience. He does not reply to* "CLUTIE" JOHN.

"CLUTIE" JOHN. You're not a forgiving man, are you, Andrew? (*He gets up and comes to the table.*) You wouldn't forgive till seventy times seven, would you?

ANDREW FERGUSON (*impatiently*). Ah, quit!

"CLUTIE" JOHN. Your da has a quare good nature. He always says you should turn the other cheek to the man that harms you. That's a great spirit to have, that, isn't it?

ANDREW FERGUSON (*who has not been listening*). Eh? What's that you say?

"CLUTIE" JOHN. I was talking about your da, Andrew, and him having the great fine spirit of forgiveness in him.

ANDREW FERGUSON (*indifferently*). Oh, ay! Ay!

"CLUTIE" JOHN. I could never be as forgiving as your da if I lived to be a thousand years old. (*He pauses for a moment, and then says eagerly.*) Will I play something to you? (ANDREW *does not make any movement.*) Are you not listening to me?

ANDREW FERGUSON (*crossly*). Ah, what is it? What's the matter with you?

"CLUTIE" JOHN. Will I not play something to you? It's a great comfort when you're in trouble to hear a man playing a tune . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON (*sharply*). Quit blethering!

"CLUTIE" JOHN (*going back to his seat at the fire*). I was only wondering could I do anything to please you, Andrew? But I'll keep still and quiet. I'll not disturb you at all. [*They sit in silence for a few moments.*

"CLUTIE" JOHN. He's a bad man, that man Witherow! That's what he is! He has a sour nature in him. Whenever he meets me he makes a mock of me and says, "When are they going to put you in the asylum, 'Clutie'?" Sometimes he hits me with his stick or a whip mebbe. He done that the day there forneut your own door, Andrew! He couped me into the hedge and near broke my whistle on me. That shows the bad-natured man he is to be hurting a poor fellow like myself that has to beg his bread from door to door!

ANDREW FERGUSON. Hold your tongue, will you?

"CLUTIE" JOHN (*meekly*). All right, Andrew! I was only saying what he done to me, but, sure, it doesn't matter what he does to the like of me, a poor senseless fellow that wanders the world with a whistle! It's quare and different, Andrew, when he does harm to a girl like Hannah . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON (*turning to him and speaking quickly*). Ay, it is different, "Clutie"! You're right there. My sister is the finest girl in the County Down . . .

"CLUTIE" JOHN (*eagerly*). Ay, she is, Andrew. She is in sang. There isn't her equal in the province of Ulster. There is not. I've oftentimes heard people talking about her, and saying what a fine match she'll make for some man, and one time I tried to make up a song about her to be singing on the roads, but I couldn't do it with any satisfaction to myself. I'm no hand at making up poetry. She's a fine young girl and a great companion she'll be to any one.

ANDREW FERGUSON. It's only a fine man that's fit for her.

"CLUTIE" JOHN. That's true! (*He gets up and comes to the table and leans across it.*) It would never have done if she'd married Jimmy Caesar. The mountains can never consort with the hills.

ANDREW FERGUSON. No! No!! I wasn't best pleased about the match when I heard of it.

"CLUTIE" JOHN. He's not much of a man, Jimmy Caesar!

ANDREW FERGUSON. No, he isn't, indeed!

"CLUTIE" JOHN. He's a poor-natured man, that's what he is. He'd be worse nor Witherow if he had the

pluck. Mebbe he is worse nor him, for he has no pluck at all. He's a mean man.

ANDREW FERGUSON. I daresay you're right.

[*He goes to the fire and stands with his back to it.*

"CLUTIE" JOHN. Ay, I am. He'd beat you on the ground that lad would, but he would run away from you if you were to stand up to him. That's the kind he is.

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ah, well, he's had a poor life of it.

"CLUTIE" JOHN. He'd have been mean-natured whatever kind of a life he had, Andrew! I've seen men like him before in my time. They think I'm a fool and see nothing, but when I'm playing my whistle, Andrew, I see them when they're not thinking I'm looking at them — and there's plenty of them, high up and low down, that are crawling when they're at your feet and are ready to crawl when they're standing up. That's the way of them. A man like Jimmy Caesar would be a poor defender for Hannah!

ANDREW FERGUSON. Mebbe he would!

"CLUTIE" JOHN. I'd be afeard to trust myself to him if I was in need of a person to take care of me. I would so.

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ah, you can take care of yourself! Quit talking now, or if you can't keep quiet, go out to the hayloft and talk to yourself.

[*He goes half-way across the room and then returns to the fire. He stands with his face to it.*

"CLUTIE" JOHN (*after a pause*). I wonder will Jimmy Caesar kill Witherow!

ANDREW FERGUSON. What makes you wonder that?

"CLUTIE" JOHN. I was just wondering! (*He turns towards the door.*) I'd better be going to my bed. It was kind of your ma to give me leave to sleep in the loft. It'll be nice and comfortable to stretch myself out on the hay.

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ay. Good-night.

"CLUTIE" JOHN. Good-night to you, Andrew. (*He looks back to his seat.*) Ah, dear bless us, I was near forgetting my whistle! (*He goes to his seat and picks up the whistle.*) It's not a great deal to look at, but it can play a grand tune! (*He puts it in his pocket.*) I wouldn't be surprised but Caesar doesn't do it!

ANDREW FERGUSON (*abstractedly*). Doesn't do what?

"CLUTIE" JOHN. Kill Witherow.

ANDREW FERGUSON. What makes you think that?

"CLUTIE" JOHN. It's the way of him to be talking and not doing.

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ah, man, but this is different.

"CLUTIE" JOHN. You can't help your nature, Andrew. No one can. Jimmy Caesar's always been afeard of Henry Witherow and it's likely he always will be. He can't help it, God be good to him!

ANDREW FERGUSON (*thinking this over for a second, and then turning away contemptuously*). Ah, you don't know what you're talking about!

"CLUTIE" JOHN. No. No, Andrew, that's true! I have no sense in my head at all. I've oftentimes been told that. Good-night again to you, Andrew!

ANDREW FERGUSON. Good-night!

"CLUTIE" JOHN (*before he reaches the door*). Mind you, Jimmy Caesar'll mean to kill him! I daresay he will. And mebbe he would have killed him if he had

been standing forment him that minute, with his back turned, but . . . he had to go out and find him, Andrew! It's a good step from here to Witherow's farm, and he had to get a gun . . . or something. You have time to think when you're going that length.

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ay.

"CLUTIE" JOHN. I wouldn't doubt but he went home. I daresay he's lying huddled up in his bed this minute, Andrew, and your poor old da hunting for him in the dark, and your sister up there weeping her eyes out . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ah, quit, man, quit! You're tormenting me with your talk.

"CLUTIE" JOHN. A fine girl like Hannah to be depending on Jimmy Caesar for a man . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. Go on with you, go on!

"CLUTIE" JOHN. And him mebbe at home all the time, snuggled up in his bed!

ANDREW FERGUSON. What do you mean, "Clutie"? What are you trying to prove?

"CLUTIE" JOHN. Prove! Me? Sure, I couldn't prove anything if I was paid to do it. I'm no hand at proving things. That's why I haven't got any sense.

ANDREW FERGUSON (*going to him and taking hold of his shoulder*). What's all this talk about Jimmy Caesar mean? You have some meaning in your mind!

"CLUTIE" JOHN. I wish I had, but sure I'll never be right, never. I'll always be quare.

ANDREW FERGUSON (*turning away from him in disgust*). Och, away with you! (*He goes back to the fire, standing with his face to it.*) You have as much talk as Jimmy Caesar himself!

[" CLUTIE " JOHN *stands still for a few moments. Then he steps lightly across the floor to where* ANDREW *is sitting and taps him on the shoulder.*

" CLUTIE " JOHN. Andrew!

ANDREW FERGUSON. What ails you now?

" CLUTIE " JOHN. Supposing Jimmy Caesar doesn't kill Witherow?

ANDREW FERGUSON. Well? Well, well?

" CLUTIE " JOHN. That 'ud be fearful, wouldn't it? Can't you picture Witherow sitting up there in his hungry house laughing to himself . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. My God, " Clutie "!

" CLUTIE " JOHN. And mebbe saying he'll look out for Hannah again!

ANDREW FERGUSON. Aw, my God, my God!

" CLUTIE " JOHN. And making a mock of Jimmy Caesar, the way he always does, and calling him an old Jenny-Jo that'll stand by and let another man do harm to his girl . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ah, wheesht with you, wheesht!

" CLUTIE " JOHN. And telling people about it! Ay, telling people about it! You can see him with his great jaw hanging down and him roaring with laughter and telling them all in Jefferson's public-house on the fair-day!

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ay, indeed, that's what he'd do!

" CLUTIE " JOHN. That's what he done over the head of Martha Foley that had the child to him. Didn't I hear him myself, telling them all about it, and them splitting their sides and calling him the great lad and the gallous boy and the terrible man for women? . . . And then mebbe him to be telling them how your da, that's

near his death, went out to try and stop Jimmy from killing him, and all the while your da was tumbling over the dark fields Jimmy was lying trembling with fright in his bed, afeard to move . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. He'd never be such a collie as that, "Clutie." He couldn't for shame.

"CLUTIE" JOHN (*coming nearer to him*). If I was Hannah's brother I'd make sure!

ANDREW FERGUSON. Make sure! What do you mean?

"CLUTIE" JOHN. Ah, what do I mean? Sure, I don't know what I'm saying half my time! I'm all through-other. I don't know what I mean, Andrew; I don't know. God reward you, and I'll bid you good-night. I'll go up to the loft and play a while to myself. Sure, I'll disturb no one there but the cows mebbe in the byre, and God knows the poor beasts 'll not complain if a poor fellow like myself has a small diversion. And when I lie down and stretch myself in the hay, I can be thinking, mebbe Jimmy Caesar is lying in a fine warm bed, and be pitying your da that's out looking for him, and be cursing Henry Witherow that's mebbe laughing now and making up great stories to be telling on the fair-day . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. Are you trying to drive me demented?

"CLUTIE" JOHN. Wheesht, wheesht!

[MRS. FERGUSON *comes down the stairs.*

SARAH FERGUSON. Will you not keep quiet, the pair of you? I'm trying hard to get Hannah asleep, but the clatter you're making would wake the dead! Is your da not back yet, Andrew?

ANDREW FERGUSON. No, ma, not yet!

SARAH FERGUSON (*picking up* JIMMY CAESAR'S *coat*).

Dear bless us, Jimmy left his coat behind him. He'll be sure to get his death of cold, for he always had a delicate chest. (*She puts the coat aside.*) I wish you'd go and find your da, Andrew, and bring him home. It's no time of the night for him to be wandering about in the cold air. Hannah 'll never rest without him near her. Will you not go now and find him, son?

ANDREW FERGUSON. All right, ma!

SARAH FERGUSON. That's a good son. Tell him to come home as quick as he can. "Clutie" John'll stay here while you look for him. (*She listens for a moment.*) That's Hannah crying again! I can't leave her for a minute but she begins lamenting . . .

[*She goes hurriedly upstairs again.* ANDREW *goes to the door and looks out. He is followed by* "CLUTIE" JOHN.

"CLUTIE" JOHN. Look, Andrew, there's a light in Witherow's window. Do you see it over there on the side of the hill? It shines down the valley a long way. Do you see it, Andrew?

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ay.

"CLUTIE" JOHN. It doesn't look as if Jimmy'd got there, does it? The light's still shining.

ANDREW FERGUSON. He might be there for all that.

"CLUTIE" JOHN. Mebbe! Ay, mebbe! Well, I'll away on now to my bed. The night's turned sharp, and I feel tired and sleepy. (*He stands in the doorway, gazing up at the sky.*) There's a lot of wee stars out the night, Andrew, but no moon.

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ay.

"CLUTIE" JOHN. I oftentimes think it must be quare and lonely up in the sky. Good-night to you, Andrew!

ANDREW FERGUSON. Good-night, "Clutie."

["CLUTIE" JOHN *goes out.* ANDREW FERGUSON *stands still, watching the light in* WITHEROW'S *window. Then a great anger goes over him. He mutters something to himself, and turns suddenly into the kitchen. He takes down the gun and, after examining it to see if it is loaded, he goes out. In a few moments* SARAH FERGUSON *is heard calling to him from the top of the stairs.*

SARAH FERGUSON. Andrew! Andrew!! Are you there? (*She comes down part of the staircase and looks over the banisters.*) Are you there, Andrew? "Clutie"! (*She comes into the kitchen and looks about her.*) "Clutie"! (*She goes to the foot of the stairs and calls up to* HANNAH.) It's all right, Hannah, dear! Andrew's away to fetch your da!

[*She goes to the door and looks out for a few moments. Then she closes the door and goes up the stairs again.*

ACT III

It is early in the morning of the following day. The room is bright and cheery because a fine sunshine pours in at the window and open door. There is nothing in the appearance of the kitchen to indicate that any unusual thing has happened; the gun is again suspended over the fire-place. MRS. FERGUSON *is bending over the fire, settling a kettle on the coals and turf, when her husband comes into the kitchen from the staircase.*

SARAH FERGUSON. Is that you, John?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay. (*He seats himself by the fire.*) Where's Andrew?

SARAH FERGUSON. He's away out to the byre. Will I call him?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, do!

[MRS. FERGUSON *goes to the door and calls out "Andrew! Andrew!!"* ANDREW *is heard to shout, "What do you want, ma?" and* MRS. FERGUSON *replies, "Your da wants you a minute!"* ANDREW *shouts back, "I'll be in in a wee while."* MRS. FERGUSON *returns to the fire.*

SARAH FERGUSON. He says he'll be in in a minute! Did you get your rest, John?

JOHN FERGUSON. I couldn't sleep at all! I lay still and closed my eyes, but my mind was working all the time.

I kept on wondering where Jimmy went to last night. I suppose no one has come up the " loanie " with news?

SARAH FERGUSON. There's been no one next or near this place this morning but ourselves and " Clutie " John. I gave him his breakfast and sent him packing. He was in a quare wild mood, that lad, and could hardly contain himself for excitement.

JOHN FERGUSON. I daresay he was greatly disturbed in his mind after what happened yesterday. Them people is quare and easily excited. I wish Andrew would come! Is Hannah up yet?

SARAH FERGUSON. Indeed I don't know. I didn't call her this morning. She was a long while getting her sleep, and so I just let her lie on. She'll be all the better for the rest!

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay. I can't make out where Jimmy went to last night. I thought mebbe he'd go straight to Witherow from here, and so I went there first, but I didn't see him.

SARAH FERGUSON. Did you see Witherow?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay. I warned him about Jimmy.

SARAH FERGUSON. You warned him?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay.

SARAH FERGUSON. And you never laid a finger on him?

JOHN FERGUSON. No.

SARAH FERGUSON. Well, indeed, I can't make you out, John! There's a man's harmed your daughter, and you didn't as much as lift your hand to him! You went and warned him about Jimmy! . . . Oh, John, I can't understand you! It doesn't seem right someway to be acting like that!

JOHN FERGUSON. God's Word says I must love my en-

emies, Sarah. That is my guide in all I do. It's hard to obey that commandment, and when I was standing there in front of Witherow I was tempted to take a hold of him and do him an injury . . . but I resisted the temptation, and I did what God bid me. I wasn't able to love him, but I warned him. I could do no more than that . . . but God 'll mebbe understand!

SARAH FERGUSON (*sighing*). Ah, well! It's a quare way to look at things. If any one was to hurt me, I'd do my best to hurt them back, and hurt them harder nor they hurt me. That would learn them!

JOHN FERGUSON. Would it? Men's been hitting back since the beginning of the world, but hitting back has learned no one anything but hatred and bitterness.

SARAH FERGUSON. What did you do after you saw Witherow?

JOHN FERGUSON. I went down to Jimmy's shop, but he wasn't there. I dundhered on the door, but I could get no answer. Matt Kerr put his head out of his window, but he couldn't tell me a thing about Jimmy. I didn't know what to do after that! I wandered about in the dark for a while, and then I went back to the shop, but he still wasn't there! I was feeling tired, and I sat down for a wee while thinking mebbe Jimmy would turn up while I was waiting, but he didn't, and so I came home.

SARAH FERGUSON. You might have got your death of cold sitting there in the damp. It's a wonder to me you never knocked against Andrew!

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, it is, but sure it's easy to miss people when it isn't light.

[ANDREW FERGUSON *enters by the door. There is a sombre look on his face. It*

is not the darkness of a man who is horrified by his own deed, but the darkness of a man who has set himself willingly to do some desperate work that must be done.

ANDREW FERGUSON. You were wanting me, da?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, Andrew! (*Regarding his son closely.*) You're looking tired, son!

ANDREW FERGUSON. I am tired, but sure we all are. Da, you ought not to have got up this morning. You're not strong, and you must nearly be worn out.

JOHN FERGUSON. I couldn't rest, son. Andrew, I want you to go and inquire about Jimmy Caesar. I'll not be easy in my mind till I see him safe and sound. I feel my own responsibility, son. I'll admit to you I was hoping Hannah 'd marry him, and I didn't discourage her from saying "yes" to him when he asked her, for all I knew she was only doing it for the farm. I knew the girl couldn't bear him, but I pretended to myself it would all come right in the end. I . . . I love this house, Andrew! That's the excuse I have for not being honest with Hannah . . .

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, sure, you left it to her own free will.

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, I tried to salve my conscience that way, but I said it in a way that showed plain what my desire was. If I had been firm, there would have been none of this bother now. You understand me, son, don't you? I feel I won't be happy till I see Jimmy safe and sound from harm, because I put him in danger. God knows what would happen if he was to meet Witherow in the temper he was in last night.

ANDREW FERGUSON. I daresay he's all right, da!

JOHN FERGUSON. I'd be glad if you'd go all the same and search for him, Andrew.

SARAH FERGUSON. Just go to please him, Andrew. His mind's upset about Jimmy, and there'll be no contenting him till he sees him.

ANDREW FERGUSON. It'll put the work on the farm behind, da . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. That doesn't matter, son.

ANDREW FERGUSON. . . . but I'll go to please you!

JOHN FERGUSON. Thank you, son!

ANDREW FERGUSON. There's no need for you to be uneasy about him, though. You may be sure Jimmy's come to no harm. We all know rightly the kind he is. Mebbe he's lying snug in his bed this minute, moaning and groaning, and saying what he'd do to Witherow one of these days, but you know as well as you're living he'll never do it.

JOHN FERGUSON. I'd leifer he was a collie a thousand times over nor have him take a man's life.

ANDREW FERGUSON. Even after what Witherow's done?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, son. Witherow will have to make his answer to God, and God will deal justly with him. We can't do that. No one can do justice to a man that's done an injury to them. We'd be thinking all the time of our trouble and wanting revenge. We wouldn't be striving hard, the way God would, to understand everything.

ANDREW FERGUSON. There's no need to be striving to understand everything, da. It's a plain matter that a child can understand. The man done wrong, and he has a right to suffer for it.

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, son, he'll suffer for it, but that's the work of his Maker, and not the work of Jimmy Caesar or you or me or any man. You're wrong, Andrew, when you say there's nothing to understand. There's everything to understand. There's the man himself to understand. Do you think that Jimmy Caesar can judge Henry Witherow when he doesn't know him as God knows him?

ANDREW FERGUSON (*impatiently*). I've no time or patience for that kind of talk. If Jimmy Caesar . . . killed him . . . he was right to kill him . . . only I don't suppose he did.

JOHN FERGUSON. Don't you see now, Andrew, that you're not fit to judge Henry Witherow either? You can't judge a man if you have anger in your heart against him. You must love him before you can do justly by him.

ANDREW FERGUSON. Och, quit, da!

JOHN FERGUSON. And that's what God does, Andrew! God's something that sees inside you and knows every bit of you and never has no spite against you. Do you understand me, son? He judges you, but He doesn't punish you. He just gives knowledge to you so that you see yourself as He sees you, and that's your punishment, Andrew, if you've done wrong. It's knowing yourself as God knows you that hurts you harder nor anything else in the world. Do you think Henry Witherow 'll be happy when he sees himself with God's eyes? I wouldn't be that man on the last day for the wealth of the world! . . . I'm all moidhered, Andrew, and I'm a poor hand at saying what's in my mind, but I know well that if Henry Witherow wronged me a thousand times more nor he has, I'd be doing God's will if I knelt down and kissed his feet.

ANDREW FERGUSON. I don't understand that kind of religion.

SARAH FERGUSON. Here's some one coming up the "loanie." I can hear their steps. (*She goes to the door as she speaks.*) It's Jimmy!

JOHN FERGUSON. Jimmy Caesar?

SARAH FERGUSON. Ay.

JOHN FERGUSON. Oh, thank God, thank God, he's come at last!

[JAMES CAESAR *enters. The look of assurance has completely gone, and so, too, has some of the meanness. He has the look of a man who has suffered great shame and humiliation, and although he feels mean, he does not look so mean as he did at the beginning of the play.*

SARAH FERGUSON. Come in, Jimmy, come in! Sure, we're all right and glad to see you again!

JOHN FERGUSON (*going to him and wringing his hand*). Ay, Jimmy, we are, indeed. I'm glad this minute to see you safe from harm. Sit down, man! (*He leads* CAESAR *to a chair, and* CAESAR *sits down.*) You must be worn out. (JAMES CAESAR *glances about the room for a moment. Then he bows his head on the table and begins to cry hysterically.*) Ay, man, you'll want to cry after the trouble you've had.

ANDREW FERGUSON (*contemptuously*). My God, what a man!

JOHN FERGUSON. It's the reaction, son, that's what it is. He can't help himself. Nobody could.

SARAH FERGUSON. A drink of tea 'll do him a world of

good. The kettle's on, and I'll have the tea wet in no time at all. (*She goes to* CAESAR *and pats him on the back.*) There, there, Jimmy, keep your heart up! Sure, we all know the troubles you've had to bear. Just put a good face on it, and you'll be as happy as you like.

JAMES CAESAR. I'm a disgraced man!

JOHN FERGUSON. No, no, no, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR (*raising his head*). Ay, I am, John. I'm a disgraced man! I heard what Andrew said to you a minute ago, and he was right. "My God," he said, "what a man!"

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, sure, Andrew didn't mean it, Jimmy. Don't be paying no heed to him.

ANDREW FERGUSON (*angrily*). I did mean it.

JOHN FERGUSON. That's poor comfort, Andrew, to be offering to a broken man. I'd be ashamed to say that to any one.

JAMES CAESAR (*as if eager to make little of himself*). But it's true, John, for all that. I've failed another time.

JOHN FERGUSON. It was God that checked you, Jimmy.

JOHN CAESAR. I went out of this house last night with my mind set on killing Witherow. If I'd met him in the "loanie" I'd 'a' throttled him there and then . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. I'm thankful you didn't meet him!

JAMES CAESAR (*rambling on*). . . . I was near demented with rage, and I hardly knew what I was doing. I started off for his farm. I could see the light in his front room shining down the glen, and it drew me towards it. I was that mad I didn't care what I done. I scrambled through the hedges and tore my hands and face with the thorns. Look at the cuts on my hands!

[*He holds out his hands for inspection.*

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, ay.

JAMES CAESAR. But I didn't care what happened to me. I felt nothing but the desire to get Witherow dead. I went across the fields, tumbling over stooks of corn, and slipping in puddles and drains till I come near the farm, and then I remembered I had nothing to kill him with . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON (*sneering*). Ha!

JAMES CAESAR (*turning to* ANDREW). I'm no match for him, Andrew, and if I'd gone into the house then, he'd have thrown me into the yard before I could have lifted a finger to him. (*Insisting on his weakness.*) I haven't the strength, Andrew, and I've a poor spirit. It wouldn't have been a fair fight if I'd gone in then and me with no weapon, would it, Andrew? Would it, John? I hadn't even a sally rod in my hands!

SARAH FERGUSON. He's stronger nor you by a good piece, Jimmy.

JAMES CAESAR. Yes, Mrs. Ferguson! That's what I said to myself. I said, " I'll have no chance against him if I go without a weapon! " That's what I said to myself. I made up my mind I'd go back to the shop to get my gun, and then I'd come back again to the farm and I'd shoot him dead.

JOHN FERGUSON. Aw, horrible, horrible.

ANDREW FERGUSON. And why didn't you go back again?

JAMES CAESAR (*miserably*). You've guessed right, Andrew. I never went near the place again. I got to the shop and I went in quietly and got the gun, and then I come out again. I had hardly got across the doorstep when I began to feel afeard, and I could feel the gun shaking in my hands as I gripped it. I went a bit of the

way along the road, and I kept thinking some one was watching me, and then all of a sudden I started to run, and I run and I run till I come to the planting. I went in among the trees, and before I knew where I was I tripped over something on the ground and the gun went off in my hands. I was scared of my life for fear any one would hear it, and I got up and left the gun on the ground, and I run on through the trees like a wild thing till I could run no more. Then I crawled in under a whinbush and I hid there till this morning. I lay there cursing myself for a collie, and trying to stir myself up to go and kill him in the daylight . . . but I couldn't do it. I kept on making excuses. That's the sort of me, John! I'm always imagining myself doing grand things, and seeing people clapping me and making speeches about me, and printing things in the papers because of my greatness and my gallantry; but if a cow was to make a run at me in the fields, I'd be near scared to death of it. It's bad enough, Andrew, to know that other people are ashamed of you, but it's hell to be ashamed of yourself, the way I am this minute, and it's hell to have dreams of yourself doing big things, and you knowing rightly you'll never have the pluck to do a wee thing, let alone a big one.

JOHN FERGUSON. There's many a thing that a lad like Andrew might think was big, but it's quare and small.

JAMES CAESAR. It's kind of you to talk the way you do, John, but it's poor comfort to a man that knows he's as poor-spirited as myself. If Hannah was married on me now, I feel I would leave her in the lurch if she needed my help any time. That's the way of me, and I knew it well last night when I was hiding under the whin-bush. I'm not like you, John Ferguson, that has no hatred in

your heart, and can forgive a man that does an injury to you. I'm full of hate, and I want to hurt them that hurts me, but I haven't the courage to do it.

ANDREW FERGUSON. Well, there's no use in sitting here talking about it.

JAMES CAESAR. No, Andrew, there isn't. I come here this morning to excuse myself to Hannah and all of you. I thought that was the least I could do.

JOHN FERGUSON. No, no, Jimmy, no, no! I'm right and glad you didn't harm Witherow. I'd have been sore-hearted if you had.

SARAH FERGUSON. He went out to search for you last night, Jimmy.

JAMES CAESAR. Who? John?

SARAH FERGUSON. Ay.

ANDREW FERGUSON. He searched the place for you. A sick man went out to try and prevent a strong, able-bodied man from doing what he ought to have done; and while the sick man was wearing himself out with the search, the strong man was hiding underneath a whin-bush in mortal fear of his life!

[ANDREW'S *voice grows in anger and contempt as he speaks.*

JAMES CAESAR (*miserably*). Oh, my God, my God!

JOHN FERGUSON. Wheesht, Andrew, wheesht! Jimmy, man, it's not like the thing for you to give way in that fashion! Control yourself, man! I'm as happy this minute as ever I've been in my life because I know God's saved you from sinning your soul with a murder. I'm proud to think you wouldn't kill Witherow . . .

JAMES CAESAR (*in a misery of self-abasement*). But I'm not saved from sin, John. I didn't leave Witherow

alone because I didn't want to kill him. I did want to kill him. I left him alone because I was afeard to touch him. My mind's the same now as it was when I went out of this house last night with murder in my heart. I want Witherow to be dead. I'd be glad this minute if some one come in the door there and told me he was dead. But I'd be afeard to lay a finger on him myself. That's the cowardliest thing of all, to want to commit a sin and not have the courage to do it. Do you think God 'll be gratified when he thinks I didn't kill Witherow because I was too big a collie to do it?

SARAH FERGUSON. Well, quit talking about it anyway. Make yourself content while I get you a bite to eat.

JAMES CAESAR. I couldn't taste it. It 'ud choke me.

SARAH FERGUSON. Now, a drop of tea never choked no one. The kettle's boiling, and it'll not take me a minute to make a cup of good warm tea for you. You must be perished with the cold, and you lying out on the damp grass all night. Just content yourself while I spread the table.

[*She sets about preparing the meal.*

JAMES CAESAR (*in whom confession has now grown to something like a craving*). I know rightly you have contempt for me, Andrew. (ANDREW *stands at the window with his back to the others. He does not answer.*) I know you have. Anybody would. (*To* JOHN FERGUSON.) Hannah 'll have the quare contempt for me too. There'll be plenty will, and they'll be pointing at me and making remarks about me. It'll be quare and hard for me to hold up my head again after this. It will, in sang. (*His voice changes its note slightly as he begins to specu-*

late on his conduct.) You know, it's quare the way things turn out! Yesterday, after Hannah said she'd have me, I was having the great notions of myself and her. I imagined myself prospering greatly, and Andrew here doing well in the branch I was going to open at Ballymaclurg, and then I thought to myself I'd mebbe get made a magistrate . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON (*scornfully*). Ha! Ha, ha!

JAMES CAESAR. Well, Andrew, there's many that's not so well reared as myself that are made magistrates this day, and can send fellows like "Clutie" John to jail for a month and more for being without visible means of subsistence . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. Ay, indeed, that sort of a job would suit you rightly! You could be doing an injury to other people without running any risk yourself! By my sang, Jimmy, you ought to be a magistrate! Mebbe if you were one now you'd fine Witherow forty shillings for what he done to Hannah! (*In great fury.*) Ah, you make me feel sick! I'll go out in the air a while and be quit of you. I'm near stifled in here!

[*He goes out violently.*

JAMES CAESAR. There you are, John! That's the kind of contempt I'll have to thole from people after this. Hannah's tongue is bitterer nor Andrew's, and she'll be harder to bear nor him.

SARAH FERGUSON (*completing the arrangements for the meal*). Well, indeed, it's easy enough to bear the weight of a person's tongue. You'll come to small harm, Jimmy Caesar, if that's all the trouble you have. Sit up, now, and take your breakfast!

JAMES CAESAR (*drawing his chair closer to the table*). It's kind and thoughtful of you, Mrs. Ferguson, but I've no appetite at all.

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, wheesht with you!

JAMES CAESAR. I'll only take the tea.

[*He begins to eat his breakfast.*

SARAH FERGUSON. Draw up, John, to the table! I wonder ought I to call Andrew in or let him have his after a wee while.

JOHN FERGUSON (*coming to the table*). Leave him for the present. His mind's disturbed.

SARAH FERGUSON. Very well. (*She goes to the foot of the stairs.*) Hannah! (*She pauses, and then calls again.*) Hannah!

JAMES CAESAR. You're not bringing her down, are you?

SARAH FERGUSON. She has to have her food the same as yourself. (*She calls again.*) Are you up yet, Hannah!

HANNAH FERGUSON (*upstairs*). Ay, ma.

SARAH FERGUSON. Well, come down and have your breakfast. [*She returns to the table and sits down.*

JOHN FERGUSON. Mebbe she'd better have hers upstairs.

SARAH FERGUSON. No, indeed, she won't have it upstairs. There's no good of her sitting up there crying her eyes out. The world has to go on just the same as ever, no matter what happens. What'll you have, Jimmy? A piece of soda or a piece of wheaten farl? I baked the soda yesterday.

JAMES CAESAR. Ah, I couldn't touch it.

SARAH FERGUSON (*putting bread on his plate*). Well, just take it on your plate anyway, and if you have a fancy for it after a while it'll be convenient to you. John, what'll you have? (HANNAH *descends the stairs.*) Ah,

is that you at last, Hannah? Come on here and have your breakfast! Do you see Jimmy Caesar?

HANNAH FERGUSON. Ay, ma. Good-morning, Jimmy!

[*She sits down beside her father.*

JAMES CAESAR. Good-morning to you, Hannah.

JOHN FERGUSON (*kissing* HANNAH *affectionately*). How're you, daughter?

JAMES CAESAR. Hannah, I've come here this morning to make a confession to you!

SARAH FERGUSON. Well, eat your breakfast first.

JAMES CAESAR. I must tell her, Mrs. Ferguson, before I take another bite. Hannah, I went out last night to kill Henry Witherow, but when I was getting ready to kill him. I got afeard and I run away and hid myself. I come here this morning to tell you the poor sort of a man I am. I daresay you're thankful you broke your word to me, for I'm not much of a support for any woman.

HANNAH FERGUSON. I don't want you to make no confession to me.

JAMES CAESAR. Ah, but I must. Sure, I must tell people the way I feel. That's the only thing that's left to me now. Hannah, will you forgive me for not killing Witherow?

HANNAH FERGUSON. I didn't ask you to kill him. I had no call to ask you.

JAMES CAESAR (*on whom the mean manner has gradually been gaining control*). If you're not angry with me, Hannah, then I'm glad I didn't do an injury to him. If I had killed him, mebbe it would have done no good! I daresay your da's right! Sure, if I'd done anything to Witherow I'd 'a' been put in jail, and my business that I've built up this long while would 'a' been sold on me,

and mebbe I'd be hanged, and there'd be no good in that at all. I wonder now is it not better to forget and forgive! Of course, if a man does wrong he ought to be made to suffer for it. That's only right, and if Witherow was brought before the magistrates . . .

[HANNAH *gets up suddenly in distress.*

HANNAH FERGUSON. Oh, quit talking about it, quit talking!

[*She goes to the sofa and throws herself prone on it.*

SARAH FERGUSON (*going to her*). There, there, Hannah, don't be upsetting yourself!

[*She comforts* HANNAH.

JAMES CAESAR. That's the way of me again, John! I'm always raking things up! I wish now I had killed Witherow. There'd be some satisfaction in that! Do you think Hannah 'd marry me if I was to ask her again? I'd be willing to marry her just the same! (*He turns to* HANNAH.) Hi, Hannah, do you hear that? I'm willing to marry you just the same if you'll have me! Will you?

[HANNAH *still sobbing, does not reply.*

SARAH FERGUSON. Hannah, dear, do you not hear Jimmy speaking to you?

JAMES CAESAR (*getting up and going to* HANNAH). Listen, Hannah! I was thinking as I was coming along that mebbe you'd have a poor opinion of me when you heard the way I'd behaved, but mebbe after all things has turned out for the best, and if you'll marry me I daresay we'll be as happy as any one. (*To* MRS. FERGUSON.) Dear bless us, Mrs. Ferguson, it's quare the way my mind

alters every wee minute or so! I think one time I ought to have killed Witherow, and then I think another time I was right not to kill him, and one minute I'm ashamed of myself and another minute I'm near satisfied. (*To* HANNAH.) Are you listening to me, Hannah?

JOHN FERGUSON. Don't trouble her now, Jimmy! Come and finish your breakfast.

JAMES CAESAR. Well, we can discuss it later. (*He returns to the table and begins his meal again.*) When I come in here this morning I felt as if I could never put another bite of food in my mouth, and now I'm eating my breakfast as easy as anything. How would you account for the like of that, John?

JOHN FERGUSON. I can account for nothing, Jimmy, outside God's will.

JAMES CAESAR (*unctuously*). Ah, that's true. "God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform."

["CLUTIE" JOHN *enters in a state of great excitement.*

"CLUTIE" JOHN. Mr. Ferguson! Mr. Ferguson!!

SARAH FERGUSON (*starting up in alarm*). Ah, "Clutie" John, go 'long with you! You near start'ed me out of my wits! What do you want to come running in like that for? Go 'long with you, man! We don't want you here the day again!

"CLUTIE" JOHN (*tensely*). I must tell you, I must tell you! Mr. Ferguson! . . . (*He sees* JAMES CAESAR.) Oh, there's Mr. Caesar!

JAMES CAESAR. Have you never seen me before, you great gumph you, that you're standing there gaping at me like that?

JOHN FERGUSON. What is it, "Clutie"? (*To* JAMES CAESAR.) Don't be harsh with him, Jimmy! He's greatly upset after what happened yesterday.

JAMES CAESAR. All right!

[*He goes on with his meal.*

"CLUTIE" JOHN. I've fearful news for you, Mr. Ferguson! It's quare Mr. Caesar should be here!

JAMES CAESAR. What's quare about it?

"CLUTIE" JOHN (*looking at him in an odd manner*). Didn't you kill Mr. Witherow?

JAMES CAESAR (*rising in a fury*). Quit out of the place, damn you . . .

"CLUTIE" JOHN (*shrinking from* CAESAR *and running to* JOHN FERGUSON). Don't let him strike me, Mr. Ferguson! I'm afeard of my life of him!

JOHN FERGUSON (*quietening him*). He'll not harm you, "Clutie." Sit down somewhere and control yourself! And don't be talking about killing anybody!

"CLUTIE" JOHN. But he's dead, Mr. Ferguson!

JOHN FERGUSON. Dead!

SARAH FERGUSON. Who's dead?

"CLUTIE" JOHN. Henry Witherow!

JOHN FERGUSON. My God!

"CLUTIE" JOHN. He was found this morning in the farmyard shot through the heart.

JOHN FERGUSON. Shot!

"CLUTIE" JOHN. Ay, shot he was! The peelers is up at the farm now. Sergeant Kernaghan and two constables is there . . .

SARAH FERGUSON. Aw, it's not true, it's not true! The poor creature's demented and doesn't know what he's saying!

HANNAH FERGUSON. "Clutie," are you sure? . . .

"CLUTIE" JOHN. Ay, Hannah, I am. Certain sure! (*To* MRS. FERGUSON.) It is true. It is indeed, and 'deed and doubles! I wouldn't tell you a lie for the world. I saw his corpse myself, stretched out in the yard. It was quare to think of him lying there, and me could hit him if I liked and him couldn't hit back!

JAMES CAESAR. But . . . but who killed him? (JOHN FERGUSON *turns to look at him, and* JAMES CAESAR *sees accusation in his eyes.*) I didn't do it, John! It wasn't me that killed him! I swear to God it wasn't me! I'll take my oath on the Bible! . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. Jimmy! . . .

JAMES CAESAR. I tell you I didn't do it. How do you know he's dead? You only have "Clutie" John's word for it, and you know rightly he's away in the mind!

HANNAH FERGUSON. Oh, he's dead, thank God, he's dead!

JAMES CAESAR (*turning to her*). It's mebbe not true, Hannah . . .

"CLUTIE" JOHN. It's as true as death, Hannah! I tell you I saw him myself, and the peelers were asking a wheen of questions . . .

JAMES CAESAR (*in a panic*). Did they ask anything about me, "Clutie"? (*He does not wait for an answer, but sitting down at the table buries his face in his hands.*) Oh, my God, they'll be blaming me for it, and I never did it at all! (*He gets up and goes to* JOHN FERGUSON, *plucking his arm.*) John, listen to me! You know the sort I am, don't you? You know rightly I couldn't have done it myself! I came here this morning and told you I was afeard to do it! Oh, my God, won't you believe me?

HANNAH FERGUSON. Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR (*miserably*). Ay, Hannah.

HANNAH FERGUSON. Don't deny it if you did it.

JAMES CAESAR. I wouldn't deny it! (*He goes to* HANNAH.) Hannah, make your da believe me! Tell him you don't think I did it. You don't, do you?

HANNAH FERGUSON. You say you didn't, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR. But you think I did do it! I know you do! I can see it in your eyes!

HANNAH FERGUSON. I'd be proud if you had done it, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR (*miserably*). Every one 'll think I did it, the peelers and every one!

[*He subsides again at the table.*

"CLUTIE" JOHN. It's a fearful thing to take a man's life. It is, in sang! There was many a song made up in Ireland about the like of a thing of that sort. I wonder, now, could I make up a song about Henry Witherow to be singing on the fair-days!

SARAH FERGUSON. Wheesht with you, "Clutie"!

JAMES CAESAR (*starting up and addressing* "CLUTIE" JOHN). What sort of questions were the peelers asking, "Clutie"? Did they make any mention of me, did you hear?

"CLUTIE" JOHN. I couldn't hear a word they were saying, Mr. Caesar, but whatever questions they were asking, they were putting the answers down in their wee books.

JAMES CAESAR. If they get to know I had a grudge against Witherow over the head of Hannah, they'll be after me. They know rightly I never cared for him any time of my life, but then I never done any harm to him for

all my talk, and if they didn't know about Hannah mebbe they'd never think of me. (*Going to* JOHN FERGUSON.) John, you'll never let on anything, will you? (*He turns, without waiting for an answer, and speaks to* MRS. FERGUSON *and* HANNAH.) You two won't either, will you? And "Clutie" John? I'm sorry, "Clutie," for all I said to you. I wasn't thinking, that's why I said it. And if you'll not let on to the peelers about me, I'll give you something for yourself.

"CLUTIE" JOHN. What'll you give me, Mr. Caesar?

JAMES CAESAR. I don't know yet. I'll give you something. I'll give you your dinner whenever you want it, and I'll let you sleep in my loft. (*To* JOHN FERGUSON.) John, make him promise not to clash on me! You have more influence over him nor any one. Where's Andrew? We must make him promise too! Call him in, Mrs. Ferguson, and bid him promise he won't tell!

JOHN FERGUSON. We can't make any promises, Jimmy.

JAMES CAESAR. You'll not promise! Oh, you'll never go and tell the peelers, will you, and have them suspecting me, and me didn't do it?

JOHN FERGUSON. You must answer to the law, Jimmy . . .

JAMES CAESAR. But I didn't do it, I tell you! I'll take my oath I didn't! Where's the Bible? I'll swear on the Bible! [ANDREW FERGUSON *enters from the door.*

ANDREW FERGUSON. What ails you all?

JOHN FERGUSON. Henry Witherow's dead!

[ANDREW *pauses for a few moments before he replies. When he speaks his voice is very strained.*

ANDREW FERGUSON. Oh!

JOHN FERGUSON. He was found in his yard this morning, shot!

ANDREW FERGUSON. Shot!

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay!

ANDREW FERGUSON. That's . . . quare!

JAMES CAESAR (*wildly*). Your da thinks it was me that shot him, Andrew, and so does your ma and Hannah, but I tell you I didn't. You know me, Andrew, don't you? You guessed that I wouldn't have the courage to kill Witherow, didn't you? . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON (*turning away from him*). Ay.

JAMES CAESAR. There, you hear what your son says, John Ferguson! You hear him, don't you? Andrew doesn't believe I did it. I feel happier in my mind now. Mebbe the peelers'll believe me when I tell them I didn't do it. Sergeant Kernaghan knows me well. Him and me was at the same school together . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. You ought to try and get away, Jimmy . . .

JAMES CAESAR. Get away! . . . Do you not believe me either, Andrew? Do you think I killed him?

ANDREW FERGUSON. No, I don't believe you did, but it's likely other people 'll think it.

JOHN FERGUSON. Jimmy, why don't you ease your mind? There's no boundary to the love of God, and if you confess your sin, He'll forgive you for it.

JAMES CAESAR. Will I never satisfy you, John? Will you never believe I didn't do it?

JOHN FERGUSON. I wish I could believe you.

ANDREW FERGUSON. If you can prove where you were . . .

JAMES CAESAR. How can I prove it when no one seen me?

[" CLUTIE " JOHN *goes to the door and looks down the " loanie."*

" CLUTIE " JOHN. Here's the peelers coming!

JAMES CAESAR (*in terror*). Oh, my God!

" CLUTIE " JOHN. There's the sergeant and the constables and a crowd of people running after them!

JAMES CAESAR. They're coming for me! I know rightly they are! They'll take me up . . . John, for the love of God, help me to hide somewhere!

JOHN FERGUSON. I can't, Jimmy, I can't. If you've broke the law, the law must have its reckoning.

ANDREW FERCUSON. Have you changed your mind, then, da! You were all for love and forgiveness a while ago.

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, son, I was, and I am still, but Jimmy must redeem himself. A man should submit to punishment of his own free will, not be dragged to it. I know I'm not thinking clear, but I'm certain that Jimmy should submit to the law, whether he killed Witherow or not. It'll tell again' him if he runs away.

[*The noise of the approaching crowd is heard.*

JAMES CAESAR. I must hide, I must hide! I can't face them! (*He gazes wildly round the room.*) Hannah, tell your da to let me hide!

JOHN FERGUSON. There's no use in hiding, Jimmy. You can't hide from yourself, can you?

JAMES CAESAR. Hide me, Hannah, and God 'll reward you!

HANNAH FERGUSON (*appealingly*). Da! . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. I can't, daughter. He must submit

himself to the will of God. There's no other way for a man to save himself.

[*The crowd comes to the door.* SERGEANT KERNAGHAN *and the two constables step inside the kitchen. The Sergeant advances while the constables keep back the murmuring crowd which surges round the door.*

SERGEANT KERNAGHAN. I'm sorry to put you to any bother. (*He sees* JAMES CAESAR.) Ah, James Caesar, I arrest you on the suspicion of murdering Henry Witherow, and I warn you that anything you say will be taken down in writing and used as evidence against you!

JAMES CAESAR (*shrinking*). I didn't do it! I tell you, I didn't do it! Sergeant, for the love of God don't take me up! You and me attended the same school together . . .

SERGEANT KERNAGHAN. I'm heartsore at having to do it, Jimmy, but I can't help myself.

[*He beckons to the constables, who come forward and put handcuffs on* CAESAR'S *wrists. The crowd penetrates into the room, and the Sergeant goes and pushes it back.*

JAMES CAESAR (*more calmly*). I meant to kill him. I admit that. (*The crowd tosses this admission from lip to lip.*) But I didn't do it. If I should never speak again, that's the God's truth! I'm not sorry he's dead, but it wasn't me that killed him.

SERGEANT KERNAGHAN. Come along, now.

JAMES CAESAR. Good-bye to you all!

JOHN FERGUSON. God give you peace, Jimmy!

HANNAH FERGUSON (*going to* CAESAR *and touching his arm.*) Good-bye, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR. I wish for your sake I had killed him, I'd be a happier man nor I am.

SERGEANT KERNAGHAN. I must ask you to come along now. (*To the constables.*) Just clear the crowd away from the door!

[*The constables push the people away from the door, and then they and the Sergeant close about* JIMMY CAESAR *and take him away. The crowd surges round them and slowly disappears, murmuring loudly as it goes.* HANNAH *closes the door behind them and then goes and sits down on the sofa beside her mother, who is weeping. There is silence for a moment.*

JOHN FERGUSON. God knows His own ways best!

[ANDREW *stands staring in front of him. Then he goes to the door and opens it, and stands gazing down the "loanie" after the retreating crowd.* "CLUTIE" JOHN *sits down on the seat in the fireplace and takes out his whistle. He begins to play "Willie Reilly and his Colleen Bawn."*

ANDREW FERGUSON (fiercely). Quit that damned whistle, will you?

["CLUTIE" JOHN *looks up at him questioningly, and then puts the whistle away.* ANDREW *stands still for a moment longer.*

Then he closes the door and walks towards the fire and holds his hands in front of the blaze.

ANDREW FERGUSON. It's colder the day nor it was yesterday!

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, son!

ACT IV

It is the late afternoon of a day a fortnight later. JOHN FERGUSON, *who has become feebler in the interval, but at the same time more deeply religious, is sitting in the attitude in which he was seen at the beginning of the play. His chair is drawn up to the fire, and he has his Bible open in his hands. He is reading the eighteenth chapter of the second book of Samuel. It is clear from his look of fragility that he is dying.* MRS. FERGUSON *is standing at the door, looking down the "loanie."*

JOHN FERGUSON (*reading aloud*). "And the king said, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Ahimaaz answered, When Joab sent the king's servant, and me thy servant, I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what it was. And the king said unto him, Turn aside and stand there. And he turned aside and stood still. And, behold, Cushi came; and Cushi said, Tidings, my lord, the king: for the Lord hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against thee. And the king said unto Cushi, Is the young man Absalom safe? . . ."

SARAH FERGUSON. Here's Hannah now, John! She's just turned the corner of the "loanie."

JOHN FERGUSON (*looking up from the Bible*). Ay, wife, it'll be about her time.

SARAH FERGUSON (*entering the kitchen and setting a*

kettle on the fire). I don't know how she can bear to go and see Jimmy the way she does when she minds everything. If it hadn't been for her changing her mind, Witherow would be living now!

JOHN FERGUSON (*putting the Bible down on the table beside him, and turning to his wife*). You must never say the like of that to her, Sarah! The girl couldn't see in front of her. No one could.

SARAH FERGUSON. She would have nothing to do with him before he killed Witherow, and now she goes to see him whenever they'll let her in the jail! You would near think she was in love with him over the head of the crime, though I don't believe she is myself for all she visits him. (*She sits down on the sofa and takes up some darning on which she begins to work.*) There's been a quare change in her this last fortnight! She's quieter on it, and not so headstrong and set on herself as she used to be. Indeed, sometimes I near think she's in a decline.

JOHN FERGUSON (*sighing as he speaks*). Ay, she's been through a mort of sorrow, that girl! She's young to be feeling the weight of the world already.

SARAH FERGUSON. Ay, indeed! And there's Andrew hasn't a word to say to any one since it happened. Sometimes I try to talk to him about Jimmy, but sure I might as well hold my tongue. All I can get out of him is "Ay, ma!" or "No," or mebbe he'll just nod his head. (*She sighs.*) Ah, dear, our children seem to be slipping away from us, John!

JOHN FERGUSON. Mebbe they're going past us, Sarah. It's natural, that! You and your children can't keep pace with each other all your life. They must get ahead of you some time. It hurts you when you feel them outstripping

you, but it's the way God works, and sure He doesn't leave you without a consolation of some sort. God never hits you with both hands at the one time, Sarah, and if we're losing our children, we're finding ourselves. You and me's drawing closer to one another, woman!

[*He holds out his hand to her.*

SARAH FERGUSON (*taking his hand*). Ay, John, we are. We were always good comrades since ever we were married, you and me, for all the trouble we've had.

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, wife, ay!

[*He takes up the Bible again and reads it to himself. As he does so,* HANNAH *enters the kitchen. Her manner is more restrained than it was when the play began, and she seems to be older in manner. Her actions appear to be independent of her thoughts.*

SARAH FERGUSON. You're back again, Hannah?

HANNAH FERGUSON. Ay, ma!

[*She takes off her outdoor garments and lays them aside.*

JOHN FERGUSON. Well, Hannah, how is Jimmy the day?

HANNAH FERGUSON. He seemed quieter in his mind, da.

JOHN FERGUSON. Has he confessed the truth yet?

HANNAH FERGUSON. No. I didn't like to mention it to him, and he didn't say anything to me. But I know he hasn't confessed, because I went to Mulhern, the solicitor, afterwards, and he told me Jimmy still makes out that he didn't do it.

[*She comes and sits at the table, facing the audience.*

JOHN FERGUSON. I wish he'd unburden his mind. It's no good him keeping it up like that. What does Mulhern say about it?

HANNAH FERGUSON. He doesn't know what to think. He says that when he's by himself he feels sure Jimmy did it, but when he's with Jimmy he begins to be doubtful.

JOHN FERGUSON. Doubtful.

HANNAH FERGUSON. Ay. There's something about the way Jimmy denies it that near makes you believe him. All the same, Mulhern thinks he did it, and he says that if he was to confess, it would be better for him. There are extenuating circumstances . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. Nothing can extenuate a murder, Hanah! God's Word is clear. "But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you. Bless them that curse you, and pray for them that despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid him not to take thy coat also." Them words is plain enough. You can't twist them out of their meaning. There can be no excuse, Hannah, for a bad deed: there can only be repentance and forgiveness.

HANNAH FERGUSON. We all have our natures, da!

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, daughter, we have, but there's the one duty for the whole of us.

HANNAH FERGUSON. I met John Comber on the road, and he's set on getting up a petition for Jimmy. He says the judge is sure to sentence him to death . . .

SARAH FERGUSON. God save us!

HANNAH FERGUSON. . . . and so we'd better be prepared to do all that's needful.

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, sure, they'll never hang him

when they know all the facts. It wouldn't be honest or fair, and there's many says Witherow should have been shot long ago. They'll mebbe give Jimmy penal servitude for life.

HANNAH FERGUSON. That's worse nor hanging. They take your life, but they don't give you death.

SARAH FERGUSON (*sighing*). Ah, I daresay you're right! Dear knows, when you think of what they do to you, you'd wonder anybody ever killed a person at all.

[SAM MAWHINNEY, *the postman, comes to the door.*

SAM MAWHINNEY. I'm not empty-handed this time, Mrs. Ferguson. I've a letter for you the day.

SARAH FERGUSON. A letter?

SAM MAWHINNEY. Ay, from America. The mail's in the day!

SARAH FERGUSON (*going to him and taking the letter from him*). A letter from America!

SAM MAWHINNEY. Ay! Don't you mind the last time the mail come in you were expecting a letter from America, and you were quare and cut up because you didn't get it? I declare to my goodness it was the very day Witherow was shot. A fortnight the day! I never thought of that now!

SARAH FERGUSON (*absently*). Thank you, Sam!

SAM MAWHINNEY. Ah, not at all. I only hope it's good news for you. Are you keeping your health, Mr. Ferguson?

JOHN FERGUSON. I'm bravely, thank you, Sam!

SAM MAWHINNEY. That's right. Good-evening to you, Hannah! Well, I must be going. Good-night to you all!

SARAH FERGUSON. Good-night to you, Sam!

[SAM MAWHINNEY *goes off.*

SARAH FERGUSON (*standing in the centre of the kitchen gazing vacantly at the letter*). It's from Andrew, John! Will I open it?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay!

[*She opens the envelope and takes out the letter and an order for money which are inside.*

SARAH FERGUSON. Oh, he's sent the money to pay the mortgage!

[*She holds the order in her fingers and gazes stupidly at it for a few moments. They are all silent for a while.*

HANNAH FERGUSON (*bitterly*). God's late, da!

JOHN FERGUSON (*feeling the blow to his faith*). Don't, daughter, don't.

HANNAH FERGUSON (*getting up and going to the window*). Oh, it's wicked, it's wicked!

SARAH FERGUSON. If it had only come by the last mail!

JOHN FERGUSON. There *must* be some meaning in it. There *must* be! God doesn't make mistakes.

SARAH FERGUSON. Will I read the letter to you, John?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay! Ay, do!

SARAH FERGUSON (*sitting down at the table*). There's not much in it. (*She peers at the letter.*) I can't understand his writing without my specs.!

HANNAH FERGUSON (*coming to her and taking the letter from her*). I'll read it, ma! (*She, too, sits down at the table, and she reads the letter aloud.*) "Dear Brother, I received your letter safe, and am sorry to hear about

your trouble, but am glad to see that you are better in yourself and that Sarah and Andrew and Hannah are keeping their health as I am, too, thank God. It is a great deal of money to send, and I have had a lot of bother to raise it, but I could not let the farm go out of the family without making an effort, so I send the money to you with this letter. If I am well-spared I will mebbe come home and see you all. I am getting tired of America. It is no place for an old man that wasn't born here. Remember me to all my friends and acquaintances, and with my best love and respect to all at home, I am, your affectionate brother, Andrew. *P.S.*—Write soon." (*She turns the letter over.*) There's a piece on the other side. "*P.S.*— I am sorry I missed the mail yesterday. I made a mistake in the day, but I daresay this will reach you in time.— Andrew."

[*She puts the letter down. They sit in silence. Then* HANNAH *begins to laugh hysterically.*

HANNAH FERGUSON. Isn't it quare and funny, da? Isn't it funny? . . .

SARAH FERGUSON (*going to her and shaking her*). Hannah, Hannah, for dear sake, control yourself!

HANNAH FERGUSON (*lapsing from laughter to tears*). Where's the right in it, da? Where's the right in it? It's not just! It's not fair!

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, quit, Hannah!

HANNAH FERGUSON. There would have been none of this if he hadn't forgotten the right day, none of it . . . Oh, da, da! [ANDREW FERGUSON *enters.*

ANDREW FERGUSON. Is anything the matter?

HANNAH FERGUSON. No, no, Andrew! Nothing's the matter! Nothing! Your uncle Andrew forgot the mail-day, that's all! . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON (*to his father*). What's up, da?

JOHN FERGUSON (*feebly*). It's . . . it's your uncle . . .

[*He becomes incoherent.*

SARAH FERGUSON. Your uncle Andrew's sent the money to pay the mortgage, son. He forgot the mail-day, and just missed it. If he hadn't forgot, the money would have been here before . . . before Jimmy killed Witherow!

HANNAH FERGUSON. Ay! Ay! Before — before Jimmy killed Witherow! And then my da says it was all planned! . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON (*with a queer wrinkled smile on his face, as he takes up the letter and fingers it*). Huh! Uncle Andrew never had a good memory, had he? (*No one speaks.*) Well, the farm's safe anyway.

HANNAH FERGUSON. Ay, the farm's safe!

JOHN FERGUSON. We can't understand everything. It's no good trying to puzzle it all out. We must just have faith . . . that's all! Just have faith!

HANNAH FERGUSON. One man's dead and another's in jail in danger of his life because my uncle Andrew forgot the mail-day.

ANDREW FERGUSON. It's . . . it's a quare set-out!

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay! (*Sighing heavily.*) Ay!

ANDREW FERGUSON (*hysterically*). Ha! Ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha! . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. Andrew, Andrew, son, don't you give way, too! Set an example to your sister of self-control!

ANDREW FERGUSON (*recovering himself*). Ay! Ay, da, I will. [*He sits down.*

SARAH FERGUSON. Hannah's just come back from seeing Jimmy, Andrew!

ANDREW FERGUSON. Oh! Oh! Oh, yes, I remember, she was going to see him the day, wasn't she? (*His voice is very hard and strained.*) What was he like, Hannah?

[HANNAH *does not answer.*

SARAH FERGUSON. She says he was quieter in his mind . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. That's good. It's good to be quiet in your mind! It's well for him.

JOHN FERGUSON. It's not well for him, Andrew. He still denies that he killed Witherow . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. Mebbe he didn't kill him, da!

JOHN FERGUSON. I would like to believe that, but I can't.

ANDREW FERGUSON. He ought to have killed him. (*More emphatically.*) He ought to have killed him . . . but he didn't.

JOHN FERGUSON. Ah, son, what's the good of talking that way. You and Hannah's overstrung, and you hardly know what you're saying or doing, the pair of you. I've noticed how quiet you've been lately, and I believe you've been brooding over Jimmy till now you can't think clearly about him.

ANDREW FERGUSON. He didn't kill Witherow, da. He hadn't the pluck to kill him. It was me that done it!

SARAH FERGUSON (*starting up*). You!

JOHN FERGUSON (*quietly*). Sit down, Sarah! The lad's beside himself. (MRS. FERGUSON *resumes her seat.*) Andrew, you must not give way to your fancies like that! (*He rises and faces him.*) Come to bed, son, and rest yourself. You look tired and exhausted.

[*He takes hold of* ANDREW'S *arm and tries to lead him to the stairs.*

ANDREW FERGUSON (*eluding his father's grasp*). No, da, I'm not away in the mind, as you think. I know rightly what I'm saying. It was me that killed Witherow!

[*Now that he has confessed his deed his voice becomes quite calm.*

JOHN FERGUSON. You're demented, son!

ANDREW FERGUSON. No, da, I'm not. I killed him. With that gun there.

[*He points to the gun over the mantel-shelf.*

SARAH FERGUSON (*in terrible alarm*). Son-a-dear, do you know what you're saying?

ANDREW FERGUSON. I know rightly, ma.

SARAH FERGUSON. It's not true, it's not true.

[JOHN FERGUSON *has been standing gaping at his son as if he cannot understand what he is saying. Then, as comprehension comes to him, he goes to* ANDREW *and grips him by the shoulder.*

JOHN FERGUSON (*almost harshly*). Andrew!

ANDREW FERGUSON (*quietly*). Ay, da!

JOHN FERGUSON. Do you mean . . . do you mean you killed Witherow?

ANDREW FERGUSON. I do, da!

JOHN FERGUSON (*releasing his grip and staggering back a little*). Oh, my God, my God!

SARAH FERGUSON. It's not true, John, it's not true. The poor lad's mind is turned with trouble.

ANDREW FERGUSON. It is true. I knew that Jimmy wouldn't kill him, so I made up my mind I'd kill him myself . . .

JOHN FERGUSON (*wildly*). Quit, quit, quit! I must think . . . I must think!

[*He goes back to his chair and sinks into it. As he does so, his hand touches his Bible. He pushes it away from him.*

HANNAH FERGUSON (*going to her brother and putting her arms about him*). Andrew, dear!

ANDREW FERGUSON. I'm not sorry I killed him, Hannah!

HANNAH FERGUSON. No, Andrew, I know you're not.

ANDREW FERGUSON. But I'm ashamed to think I let Jimmy bear the blame for it. That's as bad as him hiding under the whin-bush when he should have been killing Witherow himself. It's been on my mind ever since the peelers took him up. That's the only thing that disturbs me. I lie awake at night, and I say to myself, "You took Jimmy's place of your own free will, but you made him take your place against his will!" Mind you, I felt no more remorse when I killed Witherow nor a terrier feels when it kills a rat.

HANNAH FERGUSON. No, Andrew, why would you?

ANDREW FERGUSON. I went up to his farm, and when I got there the dog begun to bark, and Witherow come to the door. "Is that you, Jimmy Caesar?" he shouted. "Have you come to kill me?" He let a big coarse laugh out of him when he said that, and I could feel my heart jumping mad inside me. "It's not Jimmy Caesar!" I shouted back at him; "it's me!" I could see him straining to look at me, and his features was puzzled. Then I put my gun up to my shoulder, and I took aim at him. "Away home out of that!" he shouted. And then I pulled the trigger, and he let a yell out of him and fell in

a lump on the ground. The dog was barking and straining at its chain . . .

HANNAH FERGUSON. Poor beast!

ANDREW FERGUSON. But I didn't mind that. I shouted at it to lie down, and then I come straight home. I mind when I was half-way home, I said to myself, "Mebbe you've not killed him," and I was near turning back to make sure. But I just didn't . . . There was no one in the kitchen when I come in, and I put the gun back where I found it, and no one knew . . . except me. It never entered no one's mind that it was me killed him. I was safe enough, and at first I didn't care whether Jimmy got hung or not. I said to myself it would serve him right if he was hung for being a collie. And then I tried to comfort myself by saying he wouldn't be hung at all when the people knew the way he'd been provoked. But it wasn't any good. I got more and more ashamed, and I couldn't sit still in the house with you all, and my da saying Jimmy ought to confess. I couldn't rest nowhere. The only consolation I had was to go into the fields and listen to "Clutie" playing his whistle. He knew it was me done it for all he didn't say anything . . .

[JOHN FERGUSON *rouses himself from the lethargy into which he sank when he heard his son's confession. He gets up from his chair and takes hold of* ANDREW *as if he were protecting him from some danger.*

JOHN FERGUSON. We must hide him somewhere. That's what we must do. We'll send you to America, Andrew, to live with your uncle. Ay, ay! That's what the money was for! You may be certain sure that was

what it come for! You'll be safe when you're out of the country, son! No one 'll harm you in America! (*To his wife.*) Stir yourself, Sarah, woman, stir yourself! We've no time to lose. The peelers might hear it and come any minute. (*To* ANDREW.) Come on, son, and get ready! You must quit the place the night . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. No, da . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, son, you must! You can go up to Belfast by the next train, and we'll send the money to you there. You'd better change your name, son! . . . (*He puts his hands to his head as if he were dazed.*) I'm all moidhered! Sarah, Sarah, woman!

SARAH FERGUSON. Ay, John?

JOHN FERGUSON. We must hide him the night. Do you understand me? Mebbe some one heard him telling us about it. You never know who's listening, and the world's full of clash-bags! . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. I can't go, da, and leave Jimmy in the wrong.

JOHN FERGUSON. Yes, yes, son! That'll be all right! We'll think about Jimmy afterwards. Come and get ready now, son!

[*He tries to lead* ANDREW *to the staircase, but* ANDREW *resists him.*

SARAH FERGUSON. Go with your da, son, and get ready!

ANDREW FERGUSON (*freeing himself from them and sitting down again*). I must do right by Jimmy for my peace' sake.

JOHN FERGUSON. No, son, you must save yourself first.

ANDREW FERGUSON. You're asking me to do what you wouldn't let Jimmy do for all he begged you!

JOHN FERGUSON (*fiercely*). You're my son, Andrew,

and Jimmy's not! He always meant to kill Witherow. Many's a time you all heard him say he would do it! Didn't you? You mocked him yourselves over the head of it. He killed the man many's a while in his mind, and the Bible says if you think a sin you commit a sin. (*He takes hold of* ANDREW *again.*) Come away, son! Hannah, persuade him . . .

HANNAH FERGUSON. I can't, da. Andrew knows what's best for himself.

SARAH FERGUSON. Do you want your brother hanged, Hannah? Is that what you want?

HANNAH FERGUSON. What peace will Andrew have if Jimmy suffers for him?

ANDREW FERGUSON. That's what I say to myself many's a time, Hannah! You see that yourself, da, don't you?

JOHN FERGUSON (*feebly going to his chair*). I've suffered enough! I've suffered enough, Andrew! It's not just oi right to put more trouble on me now. I've lost my health . . . and then there was the mortgage, and . . . Hannah . . . and Jimmy . . . and now! . . . Oh, I've bore enough, and it's not fair to ask me to bear any more.

HANNAH FERGUSON. We all have to make our own peace, da. We can't have it made for us. You used always to say that.

ANDREW FERGUSON. Hannah's right, da. There'll be no content for me till I content myself. (*He rises.*) I'll go down now to the barracks and tell the sergeant.

JOHN FERGUSON (*turning to him and speaking brokenly*). Son, son! . . .

SARAH FERGUSON. I'll not have him made suffer! (*Go-*

ing to ANDREW *and holding him tightly.*) I'll not let you go, Andrew, I'll not let you go!

ANDREW FERGUSON. I must go, ma, for my peace' sake. Every minute that Jimmy's locked in jail is a burden on my mind. I've mocked the man times and times for a coward, though he couldn't help his nature, but I'm worse nor him a hundred times.

SARAH FERGUSON. Be wheesht with you, son, be wheesht!

ANDREW FERGUSON. Eating the heart out of me, it is. Gnawing and gnawing! . . . I never get the picture of Jimmy out of my mind! I run for miles this morning to try and tire myself out so's I could sleep and rest myself, but I can't get content nohow. That's the way of it, ma. You understand me, da, don't you?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, son, I understand you.

SARAH FERGUSON. You can go to America, Andrew, the way your da said you could, and when you're safe you can send home a confession to save Jimmy. That would do, wouldn't it?

JOHN FERGUSON (*eagerly clutching at the straw*). Ay, ay, that would do, Andrew.

SARAH FERGUSON. Or we could go ourselves and tell the peelers when you were safely out of it.

HANNAH FERGUSON. They might think it was a made-up thing . . .

SARAH FERGUSON (*rounding on her*). Quit, you! It doesn't become you, Hannah, to be telling your brother what to do when it's your fault he's in the trouble he is.

HANNAH FERGUSON. Ma, ma, don't say it . . .

SARAH FERGUSON. Ay, you can cry well enough, but

that'll not save you from the blame. If you'd taken Jimmy at the start . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. Sarah, woman, don't . . . don't talk to her that way!

SARAH FERGUSON. I will talk to her. It was her that killed Witherow, and no one else. It's her that ought to be hanged . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON (*standing up and shouting at his mother*). Ma!

SARAH FERGUSON (*collapsing*). Am I to see my own son sent to the gallows? Am I to sit still and let you hang him between you? John, are you going to let Hannah drive Andrew to the jail? . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. She's not driving me, ma. No one could.

SARAH FERGUSON (*ignoring her son*). John, will you be content to let her . . .

JOHN FERGUSON (*patiently*). I'm trying to discover God's will, Sarah.

SARAH FERGUSON (*passionately*). I don't want God's will! I want my son! It's nothing to me what he done — he's my son! I don't care if he killed a hundred men — he's my son! I'll not let him go to the jail. I'll take him away myself to some place where he'll be safe. (*She goes over to* ANDREW.) Get ready, Andrew, and we'll go away together the night. Your da wanted you to go a minute since. (*She tries to draw him away from his seat.*) Come with me, son, and don't be heeding Hannah.

ANDREW FERGUSON (*resisting her*). Don't, ma. (*He turns to his father.*) Da!

JOHN FERGUSON. I can't advise you, son. Don't ask me. I was weak a minute ago. I forgot God's will.

Mebbe you're right, son . . . but don't ask me to advise you. I'm getting old, and I haven't the strength of mind I had one time . . .

SARAH FERGUSON. You'll never let him go and give himself up, will you? Oh, have you no nature at all, none of you? I thought you took pride in him, John! . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. I did take pride in him, but I take no pride in anything now. I must have sinned bitterly against God to be punished this way. It must have been something I done that's brought calamity on us. I'd be willing to pay whatever price was demanded of me . . . but Andrew! . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. Da, a man must clean himself mustn't he?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay. Ay, son!

ANDREW FERGUSON. It's no good other people doing things for him. He must do them himself.

JOHN FERGUSON. Yes, yes.

ANDREW FERGUSON. And it's no good any one doing anything for me. I must do it myself, da. Jimmy can't pay for me. He can only pay for himself.

SARAH FERGUSON. I won't let you go, son! . . .

ANDREW FERGUSON. If they were to hang Jimmy, ma, or to keep him in jail for the rest of his life, do you think would I be happy?

SARAH FERGUSON. Ah, but you could forget, son, in a new place. We'd go where no one knew anything about us and begin all over again.

ANDREW FERGUSON. *We'd* know, ma. Oh, don't you mind what my da said to Jimmy: "You can't hide from yourself"? There's nothing truer nor that.

SARAH FERGUSON (*beating her breast*). Oh, will no one

help me to keep my son safe? Will you all take him from me? [ANDREW *goes to her and kisses her hair.*

ANDREW FERGUSON. It's best this way, ma. You'll see that yourself some day.

[MRS. FERGUSON *clutches him to her.*

SARAH FERGUSON. Don't leave me, son.

ANDREW FERGUSON. I must, ma, for my peace' sake! (*He kisses her and then releases himself from her embrace. She buries her face on the table and sobs without restraint.*) Will you come to the barracks with me, da?

[JOHN FERGUSON *looks up piteously at his son. His will fails him, and he puts out his hands in supplication to* ANDREW, *and then, recovering himself, draws them in again.*

JOHN FERGUSON. Don't ask me, son; I couldn't bear it.

ANDREW FERGUSON. It'll be lonely going there by myself. Will you come, Hannah?

HANNAH FERGUSON (*quietly*). Ay, Andrew.

ANDREW FERGUSON. Thank you, Hannah.

[*He puts on his coat and cap.* HANNAH *picks up the garments which she threw aside when she first came into the kitchen, and puts them on. There is silence, save for* MRS. FERGUSON'S *sobs, while they do so.*

ANDREW FERGUSON. Good-night, da!

JOHN FERGUSON (*without looking up*). Good-night, Andrew!

[ANDREW *bends down to kiss his father, who draws him close to him.*

JOHN FERGUSON (*brokenly*). My son, my son!

ANDREW FERGUSON *chokingly*). Da!

[*He releases himself and goes to his mother.*

ANDREW FERGUSON. Good-night, ma!

SARAH FERGUSON (*starting up and clinging to him*). No, no, Andrew, no!

ANDREW FERGUSON (*firmly*). Good-night, ma!

[*He kisses her, and then gently releases himself from her clasp and puts her back into her chair.*

ANDREW FERGUSON (*to his father*). I think John Luke 'll be able to take care of the farm for a day or two, but I wouldn't trust him longer, da. He's bone idle, that man, and you'd better get some one else as soon as you can. If you were to get some one that understood management, he would do rightly as a labourer if he was watched well. Arthur Cairnduff heard of a suitable person a while ago that might do.

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, son, ay.

ANDREW FERGUSON. And Kerr, the butcher, 'll give you a good price for the bullock. (*To* HANNAH.) Are you ready, Hannah?

HANNAH FERGUSON. Ay, Andrew!

ANDREW FERGUSON (*vaguely*). Well, I'll bid you all good-night.

JOHN FERGUSON. Good-night, son.

ANDREW FERGUSON. I'll . . . I'll mebbe see you again . . . some day!

[*He pauses for a moment, but his father does not reply.* HANNAH *opens the door and* ANDREW *goes out.*

ANDREW FERGUSON (*in the doorway*). The air's turned cold.

HANNAH FERGUSON (*to her father*). I'll be back as soon as I can, da!

[*She goes out, closing the door behind her. The sound rouses* MRS. FERGUSON, *who sits up and gazes dazedly about her.*

SARAH FERGUSON. Where are they? They're not gone?

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, they've gone. Sit down, wife.

SARAH FERGUSON. Oh, why did you let them go? I can't let him go, John, I can't let him go!

JOHN FERGUSON. You must, Sarah. God has some purpose with us, and there's no use in holding out against God, for He knows, and we don't.

SARAH FERGUSON. I won't let him go! (*She goes to the door and opens it.*) I'll bring him back!

[*She goes out, shouting "Andrew! Andrew!!" and leaves the door open.* JOHN FERGUSON *sits brooding before the fire for a few moments. Then he gets up, moving feebly, and goes across the room and shuts the door. When he has done so he stands for a moment or two gazing helplessly about the room. Then he goes back to his seat. As he sits down, his hand comes in contact with the open Bible. Almost mechanically he picks it up and begins to read where he left off when the Act began. His lips move as he reads to himself. Then he slowly reads aloud.*

JOHN FERGUSON. "And the king said unto Cushi, Is the young man Absalom safe? . . ."

[*The door opens, and* MRS. FERGUSON, *weeping, enters.*

SARAH FERGUSON. They've gone! They wouldn't come back! It's not right to be sending him away like that! He's my only son, and I'm an old woman. You had no call to be sending him away.

JOHN FERGUSON. Isn't he the only son I have too? Is it any easier for a father to give up his son nor it is for a mother? Has a man no pride in his child, and no grief when it dies or does wrong? Is it women only that can feel hurt? Woman, woman, your sorrow is no more nor mine, and mine is no more nor yours. We're just stricken together. Come here, Sarah! (*She comes to him.*) Sit down, woman, here by the side of me, and give me a hold of your hand. (*She sits down on the stool beside him.*) We've been married a long while, Sarah, and shared our good fortune and our bad. We've had our pride and our humiliation. God's been good to us and He's been bitter hard. But whatever it was we've bore it together, haven't we?

SARAH FERGUSON. Ay, John.

JOHN FERGUSON. And we'll bear this together too, woman, won't we?

SARAH FERGUSON. It's a hard thing for any one to bear. Your own son to be taken from you . . .

JOHN FERGUSON. Ay, wife, it is, but we must just bear it, for God knows better nor we do what's right to be done. (*He takes up the Bible again.*) Listen to God's Word, Sarah, and that'll strengthen you. (*He continues his reading.*) "And the king said unto Cushi, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Cushi answered, The enemies

of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is. And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went (*his voice begins to break as he reads the following passages*), thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son . . . my son."

[*His voice ends in a sob. The Bible falls from his hands on to his lap. He sits staring into the fire. There is a low moan from his wife.*

THE END

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